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# *the Sea Swallow*



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## FOREWORD

At the time of writing this Foreword for *Sea Swallow* the Falkland Islands task force is heavily occupied in one of the world's most prolific areas for seabirds. Let us hope that at least some of the task force members can get a little relaxation from their onerous duties by watching some of the thousands of ocean birds that abound in those waters. It is indeed ironical that the peaceful South Georgia Expedition studying the birds and mammals was just completing its work when the storm broke. Our good wishes go out to all those engaged at the present time in the dangerous operations now taking place in the South Atlantic.

The past year has been another good year for the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society with plenty of interesting sea reports coming in. It is satisfying that the Society continues to widen its appeal to novices as well as to experts. There is a place for both in our organisation. Membership has risen to a new peak of 450 members, including about 100 Associate Members, which is a measure of the interest in seabirds and landbirds at sea and the Society's unique contribution in these aspects of ornithology.

While the administration continues to be in capable hands there can be little doubt that an infusion of more young members would help to keep the Society lively and forward looking. Older hands like me should do their best to get new members.

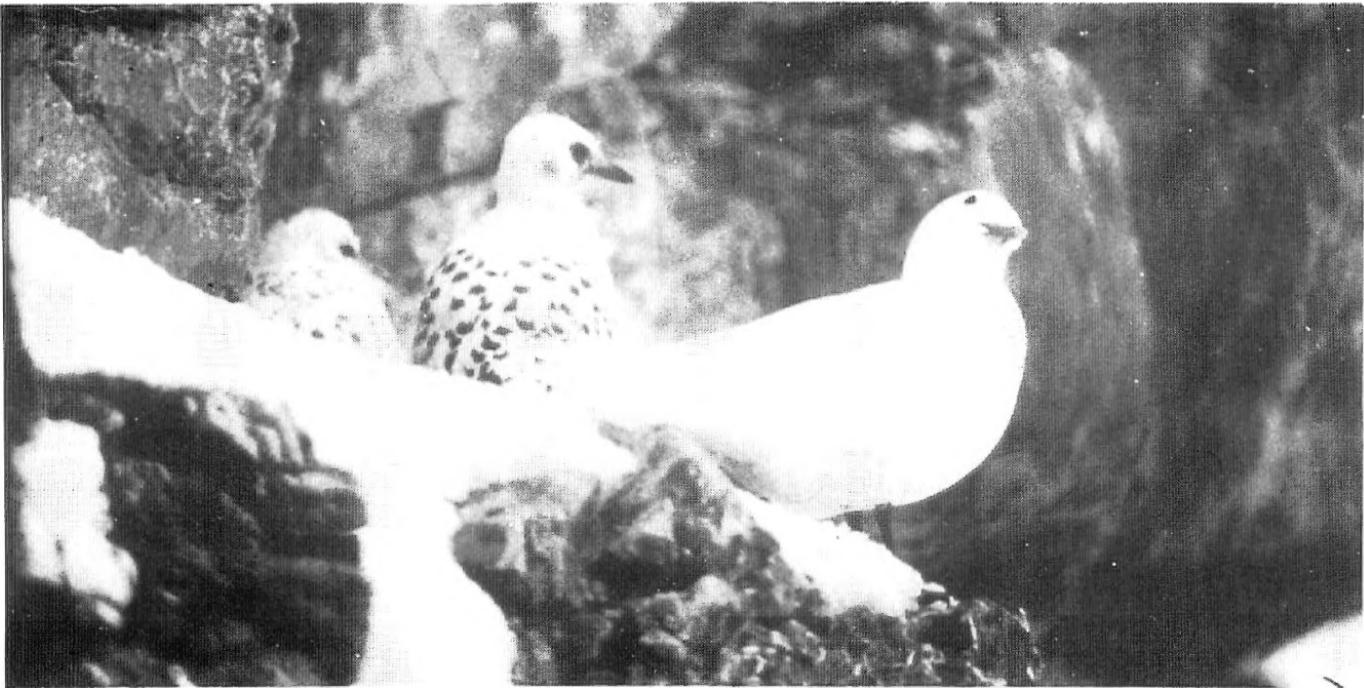
We should congratulate Captain Gerald Tuck, our founder chairman, on the success of his books on seabirds in which he acknowledges the use he has made of R.N.B.W.S. members' observations. He has most generously given some of the proceeds of his books to the R.N.B.W.S. in recognition and we are grateful to him.

Let us look forward to another good year for the R.N.B.W.S. with plenty of reports from members, both expert and non-expert. Good birding !

Nigel Henderson



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Ivory Gull *Pagophilia eburnea* on cliff face with juveniles, east coast of Ellesmere Island, Canada (79°N).  
Joint Services Expedition, August 1980

*Photo:* Lt. B. F. Witts, R.N., F.R.G.S.

## EDITORIAL

Again this year I owe an apology to all for the very late appearance of *Sea Swallow*. The blame for this is entirely mine (and ex-President Galtieri), and the credit for its appearance at all is due to the sterling efforts of Stephen Chapman and Bill Bourne, who between them have shouldered most of the Editorial task for me. To them we are all extremely grateful.

I also owe a special debt of thanks to our indefatigable Secretary and Hon. Treasurer who is keeping running the day-to-day affairs of the society whilst I have been *incommunicado* (almost), separated by the Atlantic in Washington. In addition to the normal heavy workload, he has nobly taken on the distribution of R.N.B.W.S. record forms in place of Captain Aikman who has sadly had to relinquish this task due to failing health. If there is anyone who feels able to lighten the load for him in this or any other way please contact the Secretary or me.

A sad loss to the society has been the recent death (on 16 June 1982) of Mr J. D. Brown at the Meteorological Office who has for many years extracted from the Met. Logs of merchant ships records of bird sightings. Comments on these by my predecessor Gerald Tuck have become a regular feature in *Marine Observer* and also in *Sea Swallow*. These extracts are a highly valued source of data for both seabirds and landbirds at sea, and we shall greatly miss David Brown for the meticulous care and detail (and humorous comment) which was his hallmark. We are grateful that his colleague Captain C. R. Downes is continuing this important work.

A casualty of the Falklands crisis has been the annual analysis of Landbird records this year, and also an important paper by Captain D. M. Simpson of birds seen at Tembungo oil production platform off North Borneo. Time did not permit me to do justice to these and they will appear next year. I apologise to all who sent in their landbird records; these will in time be properly analysed. On the credit side of this unfortunate affair is that, for many bird-watchers, a new and prosperous vista has been opened up for the first time. The South Atlantic is "mecca" for anyone interested in seabirds, and I hope many newcomers will be inspired as a direct result to join our ranks as members. Now that the fighting has apparently stopped maybe there will be more time to watch and record; accurate observations are needed to identify some of these very difficult species. Those of us lucky enough to be at sea are uniquely placed to add to the growing wealth of knowledge of these seabirds.

Finally, a plea for photographs; Sub-Lieutenant John Watkins has recently done a magnificent job cataloguing the library of photographs accumulated over the years by R.N.B.W.S. members, and now held by Stephen Chapman, but there is still a shortage of high quality photographs of birds at sea, especially petrels, suitable for publication in *Sea Swallow*. These are a difficult group to capture on film but I am sure we have more skilled photographers amongst our members than the flow of photographs would suggest.

MICHAEL CASEMENT, *Editor.*

## RED-FOOTED BOOBIES NESTING ON HALF MOON CAY, BELIZE

By Captain M. G. T. Harris, R.N.

During a visit of H.M.S. *Cardiff* to Belize in April 1981 Captain Harris took the opportunity to investigate one of the offshore islands and sent this report.

Half Moon Cay is about 40 miles south-east of Belize at the south-easterly end of an extensive coral reef upon which several small merchant ships are stranded, perfectly upright, looking as if they are at anchor. The island is approximately one mile long, east-west, and 100 yards wide from north to south. On the eastern end is a lighthouse and the keeper and his family are believed to be the only permanent inhabitants. The island is flat, sandy and tree covered. The south coast is open to the Caribbean swell and normally cannot be landed upon. The north coast merges into the reef, and so to reach the landing place on the north-east corner of the island we took the whaler about half a mile to the west of the island and threaded our way through the coral. Most of the trees at the eastern end are coconut palms, but the nesting birds are all to be found towards the middle and western end where there is a thick growth of some sort of indigenous tree about 20 feet high.

From seaward we could see many Magnificent Frigate-birds *Fregata magnificens* and Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula* circling over this part of the island. These were the only seabirds seen. Someone had fixed a rickety ladder to one of the trees and by climbing it we could look out over the tree tops. The view was spectacular. It was about 3 o'clock on a hot West Indies afternoon and the trees were dotted with the diminutive twig nests of boobies, each one occupied (or sat upon) by a huge white fluffy chick about the size of a large chicken. Interspersed between them were groups of frigate-birds perched on the tree tops with their wings outspread. These birds, which seemed to be adults, appeared to be taking no notice of the young boobies, and one occasionally took off or landed. I estimated that there were several thousand boobies and several hundred frigate-birds. There were no adult boobies, and they were presumably out at sea getting food, where indeed we saw many flights of them from the ship. Nelson (1978) notes adults foraging up to 300 miles to obtain food for nestlings.

The Red-footed Booby chicks were quite fearless but pecked furiously if they were approached. There were no eggs, and the chicks were all about the same age and nearly ready to fly. We saw no signs of predation, but were only on the island for about an hour.

Salvin (1864) visited this island, in the same month of the year, whilst collecting bird skins from the cays off British Honduras. At that time he described the southern portion, as well as nearly the whole windward side as "covered by low 'bush'", and reported

"A large colony of boobies (*Sula piscator*) hold entire possession of this portion of the island, every tree having four or five nests in it. . . . the young were of every age, their plumage including every stage, from the white down of the newly hatched chick to the grey dress of the full grown...." On this cay the impression of booby numbers appears to have changed little over time; Salvin stated, "I could not easily calculate the numbers of birds in this colony but there were certainly several thousands". Verner (1961) estimated that there were 3,500 birds and 1,389 nests in the course of a detailed study of boobies in 1958.

#### REFERENCES

- NELSON, J. B. 1978. The Gannet. T. & A. D. Poyser, Berkhamsted.
- SALVIN, O. 1864. A fortnight amongst the sea-birds of British Honduras. *Ibis* 6:372-387.
- VERNER, J. 1961. Nesting activities of the Red-footed Booby in British Honduras. *Auk* 78:573-594.
- Captain M. G. T. Harris, R.N., The White House, Seven Stars Lane, Tamerton Foliot, Plymouth, PL5 4NN, Devon.

#### NOTES ON SEABIRD REPORTS RECEIVED 1980-81

By Stephen E. Chapman

1980 saw some revisions to the standard reporting sheets which were originally designed in 1962. Re-setting of the headings and instructions on A4 paper has provided slightly more line space for recording and at the same time reduced the volume of paper transmitted. Revised instructions established the Seabird Census sheet as the preferred method of recording if reporting a continuous period of observation and emphasise the need and importance of substantiating unusual records with adequate descriptive field notes. A new colour coding: Seabird Census (white), Seabird Report (blue), Landbird Report (pink) will assist in separating data. In spite of these alterations no changes have been made to the data that observers are asked to submit.

This year's notes continue the pattern and format followed in *Sea Swallow* 30 and aim to provide a brief summary and analysis of the observations reported by seagoing members. This summary is based on the reports received in the twelve months' period October 1980 to September 1981. Most observations relate to 1980/81 but some late arrivals for 1979 are also included. Reports have been received from 21 members including 2 new members C.P.O. C. A. R. Bailey and 2nd Officer P. C. Dyer. One of the highlights of seabird reports this year must be the comprehensive and lengthy notes submitted by Mrs C. Roberts which cover a 3 months' coastal voyage on the east and west coasts of South America with passages

through the Magellan Straits and Chilean Canales.

Report forms considered in this analysis were received from the following observers, who are subsequently identified by their initials:

- Mr R. C. L. Aran—O.W.S. *Admiral Fitzroy*. 5 passages Greenock to Ocean Station Lima and return. December 1979-June 1981 (5 census sheets).
- C.P.O. C. A. R. Bailey—H.M.S. *Sheffield*. Portsmouth to Lisbon and return, September 1981 (3 census sheets).
- Lieutenant-Commander M. K. Barritt, R.N.—H.M.S. *Endurance*. Stanley, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Salvador, Madeira, Portsmouth. April-May 1978. Portsmouth, Gibraltar, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Stanley, South Georgia. November-December 1978. South Georgia and Graham Land. February-March 1979. Notes from personal log-books.
- Captain P. W. G. Chilman—S.S. *Lepeta*. Las Palmas, Forcados, Bonny, Cap d'Antifer, Mena Al Fahal, Jebel Dhana. January-April 1979 (10 census sheets). Kharg Island-Fos. April-May 1979 (4 census sheets).
- Captain J. K. Currie—M.V. *Causeway*. Long Beach, Saikaide, Gladstone, Tacoma. June-July 1980 (2 page report).
- 2nd Officer P. C. Dyer—M.V. *Wild Cormorant*. South Africa, Sweden, Cork, Vera Cruz (via Azores), Puerto Armuelles, Trieste, Gulfport (Mississippi), Tampa, Durban, Sydney. October 1980-January 1981 (5 page report).
- Radio Officer M. G. Finn—M.V. *Devonbrook*. U.K., Santos, Jacksonville. August-September 1980 (2 page report).
- Captain M. G. T. Harris, R.N.—H.M.S. *Cardiff*. Portsmouth, Bermuda, Belize, Port Everglades, West Indies and return to Portsmouth via Azores. March-June 1981 (13 page report).
- Chief Officer R. H. Johnston—M.V. *Star Oriole*. Durban, Fos. March 1981 (2 census sheets).
- 2nd Officer C. R. Lisher—M.V. *Garrison Point*. U.K., Mississippi River and return. January-February 1981 (3 page report).
- 3rd Officer A. R. Louch—R.R.S. *Shackleton*. Forties sea-area and Bosies Bank. September 1980 (1 page report). Barry, Stornoway, Ardrossan, Barry. April 1981 (2 page report). Nymphe Bank and English Channel. September-October 1981. (3 census sheets).
- Captain W. A. Murison—M.V. *Resolution Bay*. U.K., Panama, New Zealand and return via Cape Horn. May-July 1980. M.V. *Botany Bay*, U.K., Australia via Suez and return. October 1979-September 1980. (Log-book of observations).
- Mrs C. Roberts—M.V. *Fjord Liner*. Durban, Tokyo Bay, Los Angeles. June-July 1980 (3 page report). M.V. *Corral*. Los Angeles, Callao, Valparaiso, Callao, Honolulu, Nagoya, Kobe. November 1980-January 1981 (3 census sheets and 9 page report). Keelung, Busan, Nagoya, Yokohama, Hong Kong.

- Kong, Singapore, Malacca Strait, Durban, Montevideo, Punta Arenas, Valparaiso, Antofagasta, and return to Punta Arenas, Montevideo and Santos. March-July 1981 (5 census sheets and 31 page report).
- Captain K. Salwegter—M.V. *Amstelstroom*. U.S. east coast, Panama, Bontang (Borneo), Jakarta. April-June 1980 (6 census sheets). M.V. *Nedlloyd Madras*. Penang, Cape Town, Lome. September 1980 (3 census sheets). M.V. *Amstelvliet*. Varna, New Orleans, Constanza, New Orleans, Panama, Tsamkong. April-July 1981 (10 census sheets).
- Captain G. H. Selby-Smith—R.R.S. *Challenger*. Celtic Sea. October 1980 (1 page report).
- Captain D. M. Simpson—M.V. *Bigorange XI*. Sharjah. Bombay High, Sharjah. October 1980 (1 census sheet). M.V. *Pacific Worker*/M.V. *Bigorange XI*. United Arab Emirates. August-September 1980. (3 pages of notes). Offshore Brunei. January-March 1981 (2 pages of notes). M.V. *Pacific Teak*. Tembungo Oil Terminal, Brunei. July-September 1981 (3 census sheets).
- Captain J. W. Waldie—M.V. *Berkshire*. Houston, Santos, Paranagua, Europoort, Mississippi, Alexandria. May-September 1980 (4 page report). Wilmington, Amsterdam, Suez, Singapore, Shimizu, Vancouver. February-June 1981 (4 page report).
- Mr and Mrs B. H. Watts—S.S. *Canberra*. Sydney, Japan, India, Mombasa, Suez, Southampton. February-April 1980 (6 page report).
- Radio Officer W. Weitkowitz—M.V. *Andalusia*. Yokohama, Kasaoka, Djibouti, Aqaba, Suez, Barcelona, Leith. July-August 1980 (8 page report). Rotterdam, Suez, Djeddah, Djibouti, Aden, Mukalla, Port Elizabeth, Setubal, Caen. September-December 1980 (14 page report). M.V. *Fuerte Ventura*. Dunkirk, Richards Bay, Rotterdam. April-June 1981 (9 page report).
- Captain J. W. Welch—M.V. *Resolution Bay*. Wellington to Zeebrugge via Cape Horn. March 1981 (5 page report).
- Captain R. R. Will—M.V. *King George*. Panama, Kashima, Sunda Strait, Richards Bay, Marseilles. September-November 1980 (3 page report). Rotterdam, Puerto Ordaz, Orinoco River, Panama, Kaohsiung. April-June 1981 (2 page report). Gove (Australia), Cape Town, Rotterdam. August-September 1981 (2 page report).
- Various observers—H.M.S. *Endurance*. Gibraltar, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Graham Land and return passage. October 1979-May 1980 (Natural History Log for 1979-80 season).

## NOTES ON SPECIES

### PENGUINS SPHENISCIDAE

#### Magellan Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*

Small numbers sighted at 35°31'S 53°26'W, 60 miles offshore, on 30 May 81 and again at 150 miles off Punta Delgada, a position still well in the shallow continental shelf water, on 1 Jun 81 (CR). The same observer counted a total of 170 in groups (3-60 birds) at 37°22'S 56°42'W 15 miles offshore on 5 Jul 81. These birds were fishing and porpoising and were pin-pointed by terns in flight overhead. Further north at 31°30'S 50°55'W 20 miles offshore CR reported 16 uncertain on 18 Jul 81.

### ALBATROSSES DIOMEDEIDAE

#### Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*

First sighted at 30°37'S 31°02'E on passage from Kharg Island to Fos on 22 Apr 79 (PWGC). Observers on H.M.S. *Endurance* en route to and from Antarctica reported first/last sightings of a single immature at 27°21'S 46°13'W and 29°09'S 47°14'W on 20 Nov 79 and 17 Apr 80 respectively. WAM sighted small numbers daily, including adults on a Pacific crossing from Port Chalmers to Cape Horn in Jan 80. On his next voyage, via Cape of Good Hope, an immature was sighted on 24 May 80 at 27°06'S 12°27'E and both adults and immatures were then seen daily until 7 Jun at 38°57'S 42°12'E. Tropical occurrences of immatures are well known to be part of the distribution pattern of this species. Records reported include the following:

Number	Position	Date	Observer
5	21°14'S 12°25'E	21 Aug 80	KS
1	14°30'S 9°29'E	22 Aug 80	KS
2	22°48'S 7°54'E	1 Sep 81	RRW
1	19°00'S 4°30'E	2 Sep 81	RRW

#### Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*

A single bird following ship at 20 knots in long sweeps across the wake at 42°30'S 150°01'W on 2 Jul (WAM); identification supported by an excellent sketch. Reported on several occasions Mar 81 on a crossing from Wellington to C. Horn and off the Falklands (JWW). Brief supporting notes commented on the difficulty in distinguishing some birds from *D. exulans*. Mr Peter Harrison's identification paper, see *Sea Swallow* 30: 68-77, should now be helpful in this respect.

#### Waved Albatross *Diomedea irrorata*

1 on 22 Nov 80 150 miles WSW of Punta Parinas, Peru and on the following day 466 miles SW of Chimbote. Although CR was unable at the time to identify the species of albatross the supporting descriptions leave little doubt that these two sightings were both of this species.

### Black-footed Albatross *Diomedea nigripes*

That this common albatross does not frequent the low latitudes of the North Pacific was well demonstrated in May-Jun 80 when KS crossed from Balboa to Bontang on parallel 2°N. Regular seabird watches and censuses were made but he did not sight this albatross. 5 on 17 Jan at 21°45'N 163°31'W and then small numbers daily following the ship around the stern like gulls at 25 Jan 81 at 27°33'N 157°21'E (CR). 1 on 15 Jul 81 at 22°33'N 159°07'W (KS). Seen daily following astern on a crossing from Shimizu to Vancouver, with a maximum of 8 on 1 Jun 81 at 47°N 146°W (JWWa).

### Laysan Albatross *Diomedea immutabilis*

Nil on May-Jun 80 crossing Balboa-Bontang on parallel 2°N (KS). 1 or 2 seen daily from 21°45'N 163°31'W to 27°33'N 157°21'E on a passage Honolulu-Nagoya in Jan 81 (CR). 3 only recorded on 19 Jul 81 at 27°15'N 178°50'W on composite great circle passage from Balboa to Tsamkong (KS). Daily sightings in May 81 from 36°52'N 143°25'E to 47°16'N 136°30'W (JWWa).

### Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*

Apart from the expected numbers and incidences on the Cape route and in the southern oceans JWWa on the Brazil coast saw 4 on 25 May 80 off C. de Sao Tome (22°S) and 8 on 11 Jul 80 at 23°38'S 43°15'W. On the opposite side of the South American continent CR saw 5 on 15 Jun 81 32'SW of Antofagasta and 5 the following day near Iquique.

### Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta*

18 in two hours at 32°48'S 17°11'E on 13 Mar 79 (PWGC), 8 at 21°14'S 12°25'E on 21 Aug 80 (KS) and numerous sightings off the Cape in May 81 (WW).

### Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos*

Numerous sightings off the South African coast by several observers. Census count of 23 in 1½ hours at 29°S 14°E on 12 Mar 79 (PWGC). 20 at 23°30'S 42°38'W on 11 Jul 80 (JWWa). An unusually large number for the east coast of South America, 51 in two groups, were reported from 24°44'S 46°46'W on 17 May 81 (CR). A few seen at 25°57'S 10°38'E on 6 May 81 and then seen daily to Richards Bay, and on a return passage northwards to 26°27'S 10°54'E when 2 reported on 31 May 81 (WW).

### Grey-headed Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma*

A single adult at 33°40'S 17°11'E on 8 May 81 reported by WW who in supporting notes comments: "Yellow stripes on upper and lower mandible were recognisable. The grey colouring on the head, chin and neck distinguish the species from young mollymawks, from Buller's and from Yellow-nosed and likewise from the Shy Albatross. Many Yellow-nosed show grey on the head

and neck, the bill however is differently coloured. The Yellow-nosed has more white on the underwing than the Grey-headed."

#### Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria fusca*

The genus of sooty albatrosses is of course readily distinguished from all other small albatrosses by their dark colouration, long-winged appearance and long wedge-shaped tail. Three sightings of Sooty Albatross were reported. 1 at 38°32'S 107°31'E on 3 Jun 80 (WAM), 1 at 38°47'S 99°15'E on 26 Dec (PCD), and 1 accompanying a ship at 21 knots at 43°S 53°W on 19 Mar 81 (JWWe).

#### Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata*

Records are seldom received from the seas adjacent to the Antarctic continent. This sighting of 5 birds from H.M.S. *Endurance* is therefore of particular interest at 65°29'S 69°01'W on 19 Feb 80. Reported by WAM on two southern ocean voyages; in the Indian Ocean 1 at 38°32'S 107°31'E on 3 Jun 80 and in the Pacific on 1, 2 and 3 Jul 80 with a maximum count of 16 at 44°08'S 166°17'W on 1 Jul.

#### FULMARS, PRIONS, PETRELS SHEARWATERS *PROCELLARIIDAE*

#### Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus/halli*

Invariably no details, or insufficient details, are reported to support claims for the occasional sightings of the more northerly breeding species *M. halli*. For those observers keen to attempt separating the two species in the field it may be worth re-stating in summary below the essential distinctions between *M. halli* and *M. giganteus* given by Bourne & Warham (1966) (with amendments by Bourne pers. comm.) and confirmed for birds around the southern coasts of Australia by Johnstone (1971).

<i>MACRONECTES GIGANTEUS</i>	<i>MACRONECTES HALLI</i>
<b>Breeding and Migration</b>	
Antarctic zone and convergence. Immature go to temperate seas.	Sub-antarctic zone and convergence.
<b>Body plumage</b>	
Dimorphic. Pale phase always white. Dark phase adult is grey with pale grey head and throat.	No pale phase. Adult has dark grey body and head, and pale face with freckled cheeks.
<b>Bill colour</b>	
More or less horn coloured paling to a bright apple green tip.	More or less horn coloured darkening to a brownish red or burnt sienna at the tip; except birds from Gough Island which have green tip.

At least in some populations the bill colour is a diagnostic feature between these species.

It would be helpful in future if observers would report the bill colour of *Macronectes* sp. when viewed under favourable conditions. In the absence of supporting details, the following

sightings are simply reported as *Macronectes* sp. 3 at 34°24'S 18°11'E on 24 Apr 79 (PWGC). Max. 10 on crossing from New Zealand to U.K., via Cape Horn, at 55°S 65°W on 16 Jan 80 (WAM). Present at Iquique Nov-Dec 80 (CR). 4 50 miles north of Antofagasta on 6 Dec 80 (CR). One single at 24°04'S 76°01'W on 15 Jun 81 and present in small numbers through the Chilean Canales and approaching Punta Arenas 27-30 Jun 81 (CR).

#### Pintado Petrel *Daption capensis*

Widely reported from the southern oceans. On a voyage from Penang to Cape Town KS first sighted 8 birds at 29°S 40°E on 15 Aug 80. On 21 Aug the same observer saw 50 at 21°S 12°E with other petrels and albatrosses. Also in the Indian Ocean WAM reported 3 following at 18°04'S 80°02'E on 26 Aug 80. We seldom receive reports from the high latitudes of the southern oceans; the following from H.M.S. *Endurance* is therefore particularly welcome. At least 1000 at 65°29'S 69°01'W on 19 Feb 80 and 100's at 65°05'S 67°53'W on 31 Mar 80. MGF had a single bird astern later increasing to 6, 80 miles off Rio de Janeiro on 5 Sep 80, and 4 off Santos on 6 Sep 80. CR sighted 4 135 miles ESE of Montevideo on 31 May 81. While on the other side of South America comes the following selection of reports. Present at Illo anchorage on 13 Dec 80 (CR). 2 at 15°38'S 75°15'W on 27 Nov 80 (CR). 1 at Iquique during a four-day visit in Nov 80 (CR). 9 following astern at 24°04'S 71°01'W on 15 Jun and 6 when leaving Iquique on 16 Jun 81 (CR). A more unusual record is a sighting at 8°05'S 97°53'W on 10 Jul 80 by WAM who appreciated this fact and commented "positive sighting at 50 yards—the first bird for 6 days".

#### Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Nil counts on daily census from Bonny north to Antifer, Feb 79 (PWGC) and nil on regular watches from Dunkirk south to Richards Bay, Apr 81 (WW), and on the return voyage in Jun 81. Predictably reported on passages to and from Greenock to Station Lima (57°N 20°W) Dec 79, Jan, Feb, Mar Apr, May, and Jun 80; Apr, May, Jun 81 (RCLA). First sighted at 49°07'N 7°30'W on passage Azores to Portsmouth on 9 Jun 81 (MGTH).

#### Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialoides*

A group of at least 100 at 65°29'S 69°01'W on 19 Feb 80 (H.M.S. *Endurance*). Present through the Chilean Canales and Strait of Magellan Jun 81 (CR).

#### Prions *Pachyptila*

At least 100 at 53°18'S 63°47'W on 16 Jan 80 (WAM). Vessel passed through a flock of 300 20 miles S. Cape Otway, New Zealand 7 Jun 80 (WAM). 20 sitting on the water and others feeding by flying low over the water and dipping bills. Fast twisting flight. 38°25'S 158°17'E on 11 Jun 80 (WAM). 50 at 27°33'S 15°18'E on 20 Aug 80 (KS).

### White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*

Widely reported by a number of observers from many parts of the southern oceans. CR reported this species when rounding C. Agulhas on passage from Durban to Montevideo in Apr 81 and described the birds following the ship as "very distinctive dark brown (like black chocolate) plumage with white under the chin and pale, almost white-looking bill. Largish wings and gliding flight."

Sightings from areas near the northern limits of the species' range include the following: 1 at 17°06'S 3°12'E on 21 Nov 80 (RRW). A few at 19°08'S 5°29'E on 29 Nov 80 (WW). 8 at 26°12'S 10°41'E on 8 Mar 81 (RHJ). 9 at 24°04'S 71°01'W on 15 Jun 81 (CR). 19 on departure from Iquique (20°S) on 16 Jun 81 (CR). 10 at 14°30'S 9°29'E on 22 Aug 81 (KS). Also seen daily from 28°S 33°E on 22 Nov to 19°S 5°E on 29 Nov 80 on passages from Mukalla to Port Elizabeth and thence to Sebutal (WW), and from 33°S 28°E on 27 May to 27°S 11°E on 31 May 81 on passage from Richards Bay to Rotterdam (WW).

### White-faced Shearwater *Puffinus leucomelas*

Present in Japanese coastal waters 16-19 Jul 80; groups at 25°41'N 128°00'E on 20 Jul 80 and a few at 21°37'N 126°00'E on 21 Jul 80 (WW). Small parties regularly seen offshore Sabah, at 6°37'N 115°47'E, in Jan, Feb and early Mar 81 (DMS). CR noted a concentration of 300 at 32°38'N 133°13'E on 17 Mar 81.

### Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

A rough plot of observers' sightings quickly shows the highlights of the distribution pattern. Winter concentrations in the southern hemisphere are typified by PWGC's 25 per hour at 32°48'S 17°11'E on 13 Mar and again at 35°01'S 26°12'E on 15 Mar 79. In south Biscay, off C. Finisterre and at 37°30'N 13°04'E WW reported many in late Sep 80. WW noted these birds as regularly seen and locally plentiful, without quoting numbers, at 34°12'S 18°07'E on 26 Nov 80. Later on the same northward voyage WW also saw many at 10°59'N 17°02'W with a particularly large concentration at 11°29'N 17°20'W both on 5 Dec 80. Other noteworthy observations in the northern hemisphere include daily sightings through the Mediterranean from 34°N 23°E on 18 Aug to near C. Finisterre on 26 Aug 80 where many birds were present (WW). On the return passage to Suez WW again encountered many in S. Biscay and around C. Finisterre on 26 Sep but these shearwaters were less in evidence in the Mediterranean. On a crossing from Bermuda to Ponta Delgada in May 81 MGTH recorded birds as present in the vicinity of the Azores. Similarly at 38°05'N 27°08'W KS recorded 100's on 9 May 81. Two curious records noted as 'Positive' come from the Gulf of Suez: a single at 29°00'N 32°51'E and 2 at Suez outer anchorage both on 15 Aug 80 (WW). Eastern Mediterranean occurrences of this shearwater are noted by Meininger and Mullié (1981) with Dec-Jan coastal sightings near Port Said.

### Pale-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes*

Reported only from the Indian Ocean. Many at 2°28'N 77°48'E on 1 Aug 80 with few the following day at 1°46'N 72°31'W (WW) and many on a coastwise passage at 13°38'N 44°51'E on 4 Nov 80 (WW).

### Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*

In the eastern North Atlantic GHS-S recorded a series of observations. 30 on the sea at 50°30'N 7°33'W on 20 Oct 80. At least 100 on the sea at 50°43'N 9°45'W on 24 Oct 80. 60-70 at 49°38'N 9°15'W on 27 Oct 80 and 10 at 50°33'N 8°08'W on 28 Oct 80. Further south RRW sighted 12 at 17°12'N 17°54'W on 29 Nov 80. The nesting of this shearwater is restricted to the islands of Tristan da Cunha (37°S), Gough Island and the Falklands, and the trans-equatorial migrations from these areas into the North Atlantic are well known. CR was presumably witnessing part of these movements when at 29°56'S 49°28'W (noon position) on 16 May 81 uncountable numbers were sighted before noon and later scattered flocks were seen on the sea. Off Recife on 23 May 80 JW Wa saw 50 singles, and at 35°31'S 53°26'W CR reported over 200 on 30 May 81.

### Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*

A total of 6 were sighted on a passage from the coast of Oman to Bombay High in Oct 80 (DMS). 150 were reported at 22°27'N 125°51'E on 27 Jul 81 (KS). Elsewhere DMS keeping regular watches at the Tembungo oil installation off Sabah, 6°37'N 115°47'E, recorded just 2 in the period 1-30 Sep 81.

### Grey-backed Shearwater *Puffinus bulleri*

On a voyage from Balboa to Bontang KS recorded frequent sightings of small numbers starting on 31 May 80 with 2 in the morning watch and 12 in the afternoon watch—noon position 2°32'N 102°47'W. Then sailing due west he noted a single on 1 Jun at 110°W, 1 on 3 Jun at 126°W, 4 on 4 Jun at 133°W, 2 on 5 Jun at 141°W, 1 on 7 Jun at 156°W and 2 on 11 Jun at 178°W.

### Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Scattered reports from European waters include an early sighting by RCLA of 2 at 56°30'N 15°34'W on 1 Jun 80. WW saw several near Cape Finisterre on 26 Aug 80 and a few in northern Biscay on 27 Aug 80. In the North Sea ARL saw 1 at 56°40'N 1°00'E on 1 Sep and 3 at 57°17'N 00°50'W on 13 Sep 80 and then 3 at 51°11'N 6°32'W on 25 Sep 81. GHS-S reported 2 at 50°30'N 7°33'W on 20 Oct 80.

### Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*

The few southern ocean sightings reported add little to existing distribution knowledge. However, three records from sub-tropical west African waters are noteworthy. 1 at 26°58'S 11°54'E on 11

Mar 79 (PWGC), a few at 29°15'S 13°42'E on 27 Nov (WW) and several at 24°21'S 9°39'E the following day, 28 Nov 80 (WW).

#### White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessoni*

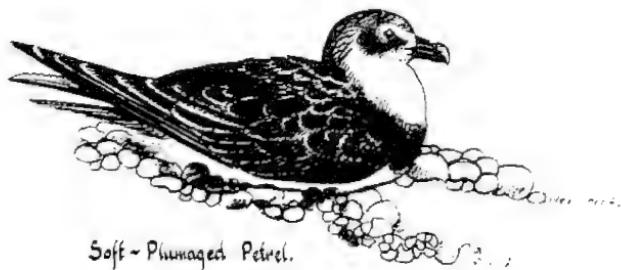
Crossing the Pacific from Wellington to Cape Horn JWWe regularly noted ones and twos accompanying his container ship at 20 knots from 52°S 129°W on 12 Mar to 56°S 72°W on 17 Mar 81.

#### Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*

A single petrel reported 20 miles ESE of I. Saona, Hispaniola on 5 May 81 was ascribed by MGTH to this species. The supporting description is not however fully conclusive, and this sighting therefore must be noted here as 'uncertain'.

#### Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*

Variously reported in small numbers from the sub-tropical latitudes in the South Atlantic Ocean and two uncertain sightings from the Indian Ocean. The following are typical sightings. A scattered flock at 42°41'S 54°01'W on 18 Jan 80 (WAM). 1 at 19°03'S 37°38'W on 12 Jul 80 (JWWa). Daily sightings from 43°S 53°W on 19 Mar to 28°S 43°W on 21 Mar 81 with small flocks totalling 40 birds at 36°S 48°W (JWWe). Daily sightings in latitude 35°S from 29°W to 50°W, 1-4 May 81 with a group of 50-60 around the ship at 42°W (CR). 1 uncertain at 26°30'S 83°42'E on 16 Aug 81 and another uncertain at 29°06'S 69°12'E on 18 Aug 81 (RRW).



#### Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*

KS saw a group of 12 at 29°02'S 39°43'E on 15 Aug 80 and others subsequently. CR, who was unfamiliar with this gadfly-petrel, described the birds as small with fast zig-zag up and down flight. Tail, mantle and head dark grey. Upper wings brownish grey and under wing dark grey. Body white with dark chest band and white face and chin. Dark eye patch. A description that leaves little doubt that the petrels recorded from 34°33'S 8°03'E on 25 Apr to 34°52'S 12°47'W on 28 Apr 81 were this species.

### Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*

Two reports only of this Indian Ocean endemic petrel: 2 at 9°34'N 54°01'E on 6 Aug 80 and several at 11°59'N 51°04'E the following day (WW).

### Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*

There are significantly more sightings of this petrel this year from a wide range of localities which justify reporting them in some detail. JWWa saw 1 17 miles NE of Ilha de Sao Nicolau, Cape Verde Is. on 18 Jul 80 commenting on "a definite pale band on the upper wing". The same observer saw 2 in the Azores at 37°22'N 29°00'W on 5 Sep 80. KS saw 1 at 36°23'N 12°36'W on 11 May 81 and 1 at 37°43'N 18°15'W on 11 Jun 81. WW noted 5 at 28°50'N 130°23'E on 19 Jul 80, many at 18°34'N 122°09'E on 22 Jul 80 and several at 16°12'N 117°57'E on 23 Jul 80. Also from the South China Sea DMS, who is a regular observer at the Tembungo Oil Terminal (6°37'N 115°47'E), reported "2 small black petrels with longish pointed tails that were certainly too small for Wedge-tailed Shearwaters with flight unlike a storm-petrel". It seems probable that these were *B. bulwerii*.

## STORM-PETRELS HYDROBATIDAE

Very many less sightings of storm-petrels have been received this year. They are of course a particularly difficult group of birds to identify from a ship at sea unless one is keeping watch from the fo'c'sl or stern. From the navigating bridge of large modern ships with eye-height 30 metres above the sea travelling at speeds up to 20 knots identification is often a matter of speculation. For this reason observers finding these birds on deck that may have landed during the hours of darkness or are storm-driven are requested to complete a Bird Examined in the Hand form.

### Storm-petrel spp. *Hydrobatidae* spp.

RHJ recorded small numbers almost daily from 35°S 20°E to 21°N 18°W in Mar 81 but the birds were too distant for positive identification. Similarly, on a passage from Bermuda to Punta Delgada MGTH on board H.M.S. *Cardiff* saw odd birds in Jun 81 which he had great difficulty in separating. The following notes, under the respective species, whilst not new may be useful in helping to separate the two commoner species, Wilson's and Leach's Storm-petrels.

### Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

Plumage mainly sooty-black above with white rump and, in fresh unabraded plumage, shows a narrow light diagonal across the wing coverts. Tail square. Habitual ship follower skimming back and forth across the wake with fluttering and gliding flight. When feeding patters sea surface. In flight feet protruding beyond the tail are diagnostic at short range.

Reported in varying small numbers from a wide range of tropical and temperate latitudes, e.g. DMS describes the bird as rare in the Gulf but sighted 1 at the Zaqqum Oilfield, U.A.E. on 26 Aug 80. The same observer saw them regularly on an Oct 81 Arabian Sea passage from Sharjah to Bombay High. CR had about 12 feeding on galley refuse in the ship's wake at 34°36'S 42°30'W on 30 May 81. On the west coast of South America the same observer saw small numbers off Coquimbo on 14 Jun 81; some at 24°04'S 71°01'W on 15 Jun and 23 on departure from Iquique next day. WW recorded them as plentiful at 33°59'S 17°29'E on 29 May 81. In the northern hemisphere WW reported small groups at 21°30'N 18°00'W on 24 Apr 81 and small groups at 16°38'N 18°01'W on 25 Apr 81.

#### White-bellied/Black-bellied Storm-petrel *Fregetta grallaria/tropica*

Distinguishing these two storm-petrels at sea is not an easy task, the sighting of the black median line down the white underbody being the only reliable plumage feature to separate *F. tropica* from *F. grallaria*. This is always absent in *F. grallaria* but not always present in *F. tropica* (Bourne 1960). WW encountered a number of birds on passage from Yokohama to Djibouti. 2 at 2°28'N 77°48'E on 1 Aug 80, several singles at 5°30'N 62°07'E on 4 Aug and 1 at 7°24'N 57°40'E next day. All these were noted as *F. grallaria* which well they may have been but without details of the basis for this judgement. It would be helpful to other observers to know the characters by which these species are separated. In the South Atlantic CR reported 1 *Fregetta* sp. at 34°36'S 42°30'W on 3 May 81, 1 fluttering in the wake at 33°13'S 71°52'W on 14 Jun 81 which was described as a small black storm-petrel with white under wing and body, and 2 at 24°04'S 71°01'W on 15 Jun 81 similarly described.

#### British Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

PWGC had 1 on deck at 24°07'N 15°29'W on 26 Feb 79 and completed a BEH form. On a passage from Barry to the sea area off north-west Scotland ARL first sighted 2 of this species at 56°36'N 10°25'W on 23 Apr 81.

#### Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*

WW reported 2 at 26°21'N 16°42'W on 23 Apr 81.

#### Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Overall larger in size and longer winged than Wilson's. Black-brown above with a broad pale diagonal across the inner wings. White rump patch. Tail longer than Wilson's and well forked. Flight darting, buoyant with constant changes of speed or direction and action: glides, banks or hovers but does not patter feet on the water and is less inclined to follow ships. With experience Leach's and Wilson's should be separable at moderate range under most conditions.

No positive sight records. 1 BEH form from PWGC, see page

## DIVING-PETRELS PELECANOIDIDAE

### Peruvian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides garnoti*

On the west coast of South America CR encountered 1 on departure from Iquique on 16 Jun 81. Further south at Lirquen, Bahia Concepcion, CR recorded 10 fishing amongst penguins on 23-25 Jun 81.

### Magellan Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides magellani*

Passing through the Magellan Strait on 3 Jun 81 CR recorded a total of 150 which were noted as smallish black and white birds with rapidly beating wings and white on the neck very noticeable. They flew close to the water but when they stopped flying they dropped underwater like bombs.

### Georgian/Common Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides georgicus/urinatrix*

At Leith Harbour anchorage, 54°08'S 36°40'W, on 18 Dec 79 a diving-petrel was found on board H.M.S. *Endurance*. The notes do not provide sufficient data to determine the exact identification but in this position it was either *P. georgicus* or *P. urinatrix*. These species may be separated by the shape of the arch to the lower jaw, pointed in *urinatrix* and rounded in *georgicus*.

## TROPIC-BIRDS PHAETHONTIDAE

An analysis of reports shows the usual scattering of sightings from the tropical seas most frequently at positions well away from continental shores. With these birds, however, one is frequently left in doubt whether the observer has really separated one species from another. More notes are needed to back identifications, please. Of course the sure way to distinguish tropic-birds, including immature birds, if they come on board is to catch them and count their retrices (tail feathers). Whilst the immatures do not have elongated central feathers they still have the full number of feathers of their species. Identification details are given in both W. B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean* and Captain G. S. Tuck's *Field Guide to the Seabirds*.

### Red-billed Tropic-bird *Phaethon aethereus*

This, the largest of the tropic-birds, was reported by CRL in the North Atlantic at 28°00'N 67°45'W on 3 Feb 81. PWGC in the Indian Ocean recorded a total of 6 in the vicinity of 21°03'N 60°05'E on 11 Apr 79. WW saw several adults near Cape Guardafui on 7 Aug 80. On a passage from Sharjah to Bombay High during Oct 80 DMS saw a total of 9 positive and 7 uncertain from the Straits of Hormuz to 65°E. In the South Pacific WAM had an adult on deck that vomited fish, at 18°53'S 117°21'W on 20 Dec 79.

### Red-tailed Tropic-bird *Phaethon rubricauda*

All sightings of this species are from the Pacific Ocean where from 1 to 6 birds were reported. Exceptionally WAM encountered

a group of 8 at 1 mile south of Rapa Island, 27°41'S 144°30'W on 23 Dec 79 and KS saw a group of 14 adults in flight at 27°15'N 178°50'W on 19 Jul 81. The same observer recorded 6 immatures at 21°41'N 138°53'W on 21 Jul 81 considered to be *P. aethereus*, but in this position is it more likely they were *P. rubricauda*.

#### White-tailed Tropic-bird *Phaethon lepturus*

On 3 Apr 81 over coral reefs close to south-west of Bermuda MGTH spotted 1 from the ship's helicopter; is this our first airborne record? WAM had an adult on board at 18°53'S 117°21'W on 20 Dec 79.

### GANNETS AND BOOBIES *SULIDAE*

#### Northern Gannet *Sula bassana*

Sightings of birds on the routes to the Mediterranean and South Africa delineate the distribution of this species with movements into sub-tropical regions off north-west Africa (25°N-35°N) outside of the breeding season confirming what is already understood particularly with regard to immatures. For example, WW noted many adults and immatures on 7 Dec 80 at 22°34'N 16°59'W, while MKB saw an adult and 9 immatures on 2 Dec 78 at 24°11'N 16°49'W. RHJ saw 3 adults and an immature and 5 adults and 3 immatures at 25°15'N 15°50'W on 19 Mar 81, then 4 adults and 2 immatures at 29°43'N 12°14'W next day. From H.M.S. *Sheffield* CARB described a fishing group of 30 evidently first year birds on 22 Sep 81 at 39°12'N 9°42'W. In the Mediterranean WAM saw 2 adults and 4 near adults on 2 Nov 80 at 42°10'N 4°49'E.

#### Cape Gannet *Sula capensis*

Variously reported from the waters off South Africa between 20°S 11°E in Mar 81 (RHJ) and from about the same position in May 81 (WW) to 32°S 29°E in Nov 80 (WW), with concentrations at 34°30'S 23°12'E on 28 Aug 81 (RRW) and off Bird Island, 33°38'S 27°18'E on 10 May 81 (WW). Census data by PWGC from continuous 1½ hour bridge watches on a loaded VLCC showed 25, 8, and 21 birds per hour at 34°40'S 22°59'E, 33°36'S 17°52'E and 29°24'S 13°52'E respectively in Apr 79.

#### Peruvian Booby *Sula variegata*.

The distribution of this booby is of course restricted to the cool waters of the Humboldt Current off Peru and Chile. CR saw them frequently on a coastal voyage and commented on 200 birds feeding at the Iquique fishmeal factory outfall on 16 Jun 80 and many thousands 20 miles NW of Pisco on 23 Dec 80. These boobies nest on densely packed cliff-ledges on the nearby Chincha Islands.

#### Blue-faced Booby *Sula dactylatra*

On a passage from Sharjah to Bombay High in Oct 80 DMS noted a total of 14 immatures off Oman and in the Arabian Sea.

### **Red-footed Booby *Sula sula***

This species more commonly takes a free ride on ships' superstructures than other boobies. PWGC reports an example of this with an immature on board a tanker on 22 Mar 79 at 8°09'S 46°37'E. MGTH visited a breeding colony at Half Moon Cay, near Belize, see page 4 for a detailed report.

### **Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster***

On a passage from Panama to Japan RRW noted small numbers to 14°42'N 106°30'W in Sep 80 and again saw adults daily to 15°24'N 110°48'W in Jun 81. At this latter position on 13 Jun RRW noted both adults and immatures catching flying-fish in the vessel's bow wave. Similarly on a passage from Balboa to Tsamkong KS reported small numbers of adults regularly to 13°26'N 101°25'W in Jul 81. In the Atlantic JWWa saw an adult at 1°19'S 30°29'W on 15 Jul 80. Without specifying numbers WW noted a large concentration 5 miles off Djebel Tair in the southern Red Sea on 23 Oct 80. DMS maintaining regular watches at the Tembungo oil platform, 6°37'N 115°47'E recorded 7, 4 and 10 adults in the months of Jul, Aug and Sep 81 respectively.

## **FRIGATE-BIRDS *FREGATIDAE***

Sundry sightings from the oceans do not add much to the existing knowledge of frigate-bird distribution. However, notes from DMS who has maintained systematic watches offshore at the Tembungo oil platform in the South China Sea, 6°37'N 115°47'E, are cited here in detail.

### **Frigate-bird sp. *Fregata* sp.**

Totals of 58 in Jul, 24 in Aug and 13 in Sep 81.

### **Great Frigate-bird *Fregata minor***

Totals of 10 in Jul, 7 in Aug and 6 in Sep 81. DMS commented that one male of this species had a broken tail feather and showed up at various times through the month of July.

### **Lesser Frigate-bird *Fregata ariel***

Totals of 5 in Jul, 3 in Aug and 18 in Sep 81.

In addition DMS kept watches at the Champion Oilfield, offshore Brunei between 1 Jan and 22 Mar 81 but only recorded a single frigate-bird in this period. This was a male *F. ariel* on 9 Mar identified by its all black plumage with a white patch on each side of the abdomen.

## **PHALAROPES *PHALAROPODIDAE***

### **Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus***

Winter sightings identified as *P. fulicarius* are reported from

the west coast of Africa; 50 at 16°00'N 18°37'W on 4 Feb and 5 at 20°18'N 18°41'W on 5 Feb 79 (PWGC), and a flock of 30 at 22°48'N 17°24'W on 30 Nov 80 (RRW). In the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea PWGC reported 100+ *P. lobatus* at 24°59'N 57°37'E on 31 Mar 79 and a further 140+ at 26°32'N 56°33'E on the same day. At the Zaquum offshore oilfield (U.A.E.) DMS saw 2 flocks totalling 30 birds also thought to be this species, on 24 Sep 80. At the Tembungo oil platform, 6°37'N 115°47'E, DMS reported phalaropes attracted to the gas flare at night and to his ship's spotlights. On 19 Sep 81 there were 300 around the flare and from 19 to 30 Sep at least 1000 were counted by spotlight. These were identified as *P. lobatus*.

#### SKUAS STERCORARIIDAE

##### Great Skua *Catharacta skua*

Once again this year Great Skua sightings feature prominently in Seabird Reports with a predictable concentration of sightings on passages to and from the Cape particularly in north sub-tropical and temperate latitudes and off the coasts of South Africa from 25°S 10°E eastwards to 35°S 30°E. Outside of these areas are a number of observations that merit comment. In the eastern Indian Ocean at 37°10'S 150°11'E on 11 Jun 80 WAM reported 2 flying with his ship for half an hour taking turns at perching on the jack-staff. The same observer noted one harassing a flock of following Herring Gulls in the North Sea at 52°27'N 4°48'E on 21 Jun 81. WAM sighted a single bird which followed briefly 10 miles southwest of Genoa, Italy on 10 Sep 81. In the south Pacific JWWe saw 1 at 51°S 134°W on 12 Mar 81. Observers on board H.M.S. *Endurance* reported 1 at 15°34'S 34°44'W on 12 Nov 79.

##### Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

A plot of observers' records, especially those of PWGC and WW, shows a clear concentration of winter sightings (October to March inclusive) in the tropical Atlantic on or near the continental shelf edge off the west coast of Africa from latitude 10°N to 22°N. In particular PWGC noted a total of 7 birds in a 1½ hours continuous watch at 11°30'N 18°29'W on 1 Mar 79 and WW described numbers as 'locally many particularly near fishing vessels' at 22°34'N 16°59'W on 7 Dec 80. Elsewhere, CR noted 6 on 13 Jan 81 at Honolulu where this skua is a regular migrant visitor, and DMS in three months watching from Jan to Mar 81 recorded a single bird on 15 Jan at the Brunei offshore oilfields. In the Gulf of Mexico CRL recorded the following sightings 3 at 25°N 84°W on 26 Jan 81, 2 at 26°50'N 86°20'W next day and 2 at 27°52'N 88°00'W on 30 Jan.

##### Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Positive sightings are less frequently reported than those of Great Skuas. WW noted several pale and dark phase birds at

38°19'N 9°38'W on 26 Aug 80 and with his ship northbound regularly saw birds of both phases off C. Finisterre and in south Biscay next day. On another voyage through south Biscay on 19 Apr 81 WW noted a dark phase bird attacking a Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. South of the equator WW saw 2 at 3°14'S 7°16'W on 30 Apr 81 and reported several from a number of locations off southern Africa.

#### Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Recorded only by WW who submits the following observations: several birds in southern Biscay on 25 Sep 80, off the west coast of Africa several birds, including 1 following at 21°30'N 18°00'W on 24 Apr 81 and 1 single at 16°30'N 18°02'W on 11 Jun 81.

### GULLS LARIDAE

#### Grey Gull *Larus modestus*

Useful census counts were made by CR who estimated 6-800 at Arica, 10-13 Dec and 3-400 at Ilo, 13-17 Dec 80. At Iquique on 16 Jun 81 CR estimated 900 and commented that this was by far the most common gull feeding on fish waste pumped from the fishmeal factory.

#### Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

On a passage through the Mediterranean and Red Sea WW saw 1 adult north of Malta on 29 Sep 80 then recorded birds at Port Said harbour, Suez Canal, Hadeidah and Aden during October. At Aden most birds showed flesh coloured legs but a few showed yellow legs. Further south the same observer saw several adults and immatures at 13°27'N 50°00'E on 15 Nov 80 and several groups at 8°07'N 50°48'E next day.

#### Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Near the Canary Islands PWGC saw wintering birds as follows: 5 adults and 2 immatures at 29°01'N 15°12'W on 7 Feb 79, 14 adults and 1 immature at 28°11'N 15°20'W on 26 Feb 79 and at least 20 at 22°21'N 17°59'W next day. Returning northwards 2 noted on 9 May by PWGC off Las Palmas were the first birds seen since crossing the equator. In the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in Oct and Nov 80 WW saw small numbers in many locations. At Aden anchorage some sub-adults showed flesh coloured legs.

#### Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

In the North Atlantic RCLA saw an adult and an immature at 56°23'N 15°33'W on 15 Mar 80 and on the next voyage saw 3 adults and 1 immature at 56°06'N 12°34'W on 6 Apr 80. CRL identified an immature at 28°10'N 65°40'W on 23 Jan 81.

### *Laughing Gull Larus atricilla*

At Tortola, British Virgin Islands in May 81 MGTH saw many adults feeding on fish pirated from flocks of feeding Brown Pelicans *Pelecanus occidentalis*. The local name for these gulls is apparently "David Bird" but MGTH was not able to discover the reason for this curious name. CR recorded 4 immatures at  $6^{\circ}41'N$   $122^{\circ}10'W$  on 5 Jan 81. The ship was approximately midway on a voyage from Callao to Honolulu and 1200 miles off the Mexican coast. In winter this gull is normally found in the warm waters of Brazil, the Gulf of Panama, Colombia and southwards through Ecuador to the coasts of northern Peru. The Laughing Gull is not commonly noted for pelagic occurrences and this sighting is therefore of particular interest. The gulls stayed with the ship "quite a while" and from a photograph and the full descriptive notes and sketch it is clear that these were first winter birds.

### *Grey-headed Gull Larus cirrocephalus*

Seldom reported far from the coast, two observers noted birds within the known breeding range. In South America CR saw many at Buenos Aires anchorage on 6-7 May 81. On the other side of the South Atlantic WW saw small groups at Richards Bay outer anchorage and harbour during May 81 and near the coast at  $29^{\circ}27'S$   $31^{\circ}48'E$  on 26 May while CR had 6 following north of Richards Bay on 20 Apr 81.

### *Black-headed Gull Larus ridibundus*

2 off Jebel Dhana in the PG on 2 Apr 79, 27 including many immatures at Kharg Island anchorage on 4 Apr increasing to about 100 on the next two days (PWGC).

### *Slender-billed Gull Larus genei*

Noted as common at Sharjah Creek in Sep 80 and several seen in the Gulf between Sharjah and the Straits of Hormuz in Oct 80 (DMS). Small groups at Aden and Mukalla in Nov 80 (WW).

### *Kittiwake Rissa tridactyla*

En route from Europe to Nigeria PWGC saw 7 at  $23^{\circ}50'N$   $17^{\circ}14'W$  on 11 Jan 79 and a single immature at  $18^{\circ}19'N$   $18^{\circ}41'W$  next day. Northbound the same observer saw 2 at  $16^{\circ}34'N$   $18^{\circ}37'W$  on 4 Feb 79 and 5 at  $24^{\circ}41'N$   $16^{\circ}49'W$  on 6 Feb. Further west in the Atlantic JWWa saw single immatures at  $39^{\circ}41'N$   $57^{\circ}31'W$  and  $39^{\circ}53'N$   $50^{\circ}35'W$  on 1 and 2 Mar 81. While at Bermuda MGTH reported 2 birds at Ireland Island on 1-3 Apr 81.



Swallow-tailed Gull *Creagrus furcatus*

Photo: J. H. Agnew

Swallow-tailed Gull *Creagrus furcatus*

Reported by CR off coast of Peru as follows: 12 at 80 miles WNW of Matarani on 12 Dec 80, about 30 at 20 miles NW of Pisco on 23 Dec 80 and 2 at 11°15'S 72°21'W on 28 Dec 80.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*

A small group at 38°19'N 9°38'W on 25 Aug 80 and several small groups next day near C. Finisterre (WW). A month later on 25 Sep the same observer saw several also near C. Finisterre. In Portuguese coastal waters WW saw several small groups at 37°30'N 9°26'W on 26 Sep 80. Particularly large numbers, up to several hundred birds, were reported by WW east of 34°34'S 18°31'E on 26 Nov 80 and much lesser numbers when passing 10 miles off the Cape of Good Hope the same day. In the Pacific CR reported 6 at 80 miles WNW of Matarani on 21 Dec 80.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*

DMS saw 2 of these tropical terns at Brunei Bay on 14 Jan 81 and commented that when working in this area 3 years earlier the species was common. A regular watcher in the China Sea region since 1966 DMS expressed the opinion that seabird numbers of all species have declined during the period. Further along the coast DMS saw 12 at the Tembungo oil platform off Sabah during Sep 81, but none during Jul and Aug.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscus*

In the Indian Ocean en route from the PG to the Cape PWGC saw small numbers (26, 55, 38, 83 birds per hour) daily from 24°46'S 37°14'E on 18 Mar 79 to 11°09'S 42°12'E on 21 Mar 79. KS crossing the tropical Pacific on parallel 2°N saw small numbers (up to 100) almost daily from 156°W to 124°E in Jun 80. They were less in evidence on a more northerly Pacific crossing in latitude 23°-28°N in Jul 81 (KS).

## Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*

Single birds and small groups regularly seen at Brunei offshore oil fields during Jan to Mar 81 (DMS). At the Tembungo oil platform offshore Sabah DMS made census counts of 31, 23 and 9 during the months Jul, Aug and Sep 81.

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## GREAT SKUA KILLING A KITTIWAKE AT SEA

By S. J. Hingston, 2nd Engineer Officer, M.N.

On 24 July 1980 the dynamically positioned dive support vessel *Swan Ocean* was working close alongside the Texaco Tartan 'A' oil platform at 58°22'N 00°04'E, 74 miles off the northeast coast of Scotland. I was counting seabirds for the N.C.C. Seabirds at Sea project and noted the following species in the immediate area; up to 9 Great Skuas *Catharacta skua*, small numbers of auks *Alcidae*, about 50 Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* close to the vessel, a flock of 200 Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*, also on the sea close to the vessel, and the usual commoner gulls.

The group of Fulmars were behaving in a manner I'd not seen before. Many of them were up-ending like surface feeding ducks to feed on the small marine life and weed being carried through the vessel's thrusters just below the surface. The debris was being loosened by divers working with water jetting equipment engaged in cleaning the platform legs. At 1320 GMT a Bonxie flew rapidly past at 20 metres above the sea towards the Kittiwake flock. As it neared the Kittiwakes they panicked into flight and the skua suddenly dived with outstretched legs, not unlike a falcon, at an adult Kittiwake 12-15 metres below. It struck the Kittiwake on the nape with its feet simultaneously bringing down its head and striking the victim's skull with the bill.

The Kittiwake tumbled down into the sea with wings bent, obviously badly hurt and stunned. Immediately the skua landed beside it and repeatedly struck the feebly struggling bird about the head with its bill. By this time blood could be seen on the victim's head and neck. The skua then grabbed the Kittiwake by the neck and with a great deal of wing flapping commenced shaking and twisting it vigorously, lifting itself and the Kittiwake almost out of the water with the fierceness of its actions. After 20 seconds the

skua released the now lifeless victim and started to tear billfuls of feathers from its breast and belly, pausing briefly only to lunge at and chase off another Great Skua which had settled nearby.

For five minutes it plucked away and then began to tear at the exposed body, pulling away large chunks which were swallowed whole. By now it had been joined at a distance by three Fulmars which picked at tit-bits as they floated past. I watched the skua feeding for another 25 minutes, the sea around it covered in feathers, until the tide carried it away out of sight.

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## MIGRANTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF DURING SPRING 1979

By Captain P. W. G. Chilman, M.N.

I have visited the Persian Gulf briefly many times over the years on board various oil tankers and I have always found it worthwhile to keep a sharp lookout for landbirds, especially during autumn migration, but the period 31 March to 9 April 1979 proved memorable with a spectacular number and variety of species on board S.S. *Lepeta*.

On 31 March, when approaching the Straits of Hormuz, I saw a flock of at least 200 Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus* at 1643 H. They were flying WNW and thereafter, until dark at 1830 H, there was a continual stream of them. I estimated they totalled at least 10,000, mostly in groups of about 200 but there were also smaller groups and a steady trickle of stragglers. The wind was west, force 8 for the first hour later dropping to about force 5. The birds were having a hard battle against this but nevertheless steadily overtook the ship which was steaming at 13 knots. As far as I could judge they appeared to be flying along a fairly narrow front. At 1700 H our position was 26°32'N 56°34'E - 28 miles west of Iran.

When approaching Jebel Dhanna (nearest land was 16 miles south) on 1 April, at least one Swallow *Hirundo rustica* passed flying north. In the channel to Jebel Dhanna (2.5nm offshore), an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* landed on board and a second five minutes afterwards. Both were still there at dusk 1½ hours later. One had a slight necklace of dark lines but this was not apparent on the other. The legs and feet appeared to be pale yellow rather than the normal blue-grey.

On 2 April, whilst secured to buoys at Jebel Dhanna, a Little Stint *Calidris minor*, a Swallow and a black and white (unidentifiable) wheatear *Oenanthe* sp. were on board. In the distance I saw a very large eagle, medium to dark brown with a white rump, which was possibly a Pallas's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*.

(Note. This is a scarce species but it is certainly possible. More

details are needed to distinguish between similar *Aquila* species, see Gallagher and Woodcock 1980 p. 88. Ed.)

On 2 April we sailed for Kharg Island arriving at the anchorage on the afternoon of the 3 April. A Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* was on board en route. During the period 3-6 April we were anchored 6 miles east of Kharg Island in position 29°14'N 50°27'E; the mainland of Iran was 11 miles to the east. The wind throughout was light airs to calm with cloudy or overcast weather and air temperature about 22°C at night and up to 29°C by day. Insects on board were plentiful.

I was called on the morning of 4 April with the news that there were many birds on board. The first seen was a Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* which was very approachable. It was a very striking bird, black and white with red cap, nape and upper back agreeing closely with the picture in Heinzel, Fitter and Parslow (1972) except that the cap and nape were a much brighter chestnut. It remained on board all day, frequently catching insects and also chasing other birds.

Next were a group of three Turtle Doves of the paler race which is, I believe, to be expected in the area. They remained all day, with two seen again on 5th, and numbers built up to 11 on 6th. I noted that the neck bars varied considerably in width and blackness. One Hoopoe *Upupa epops* was seen, and another next day.

There were several species of Wheatear on board including: a male Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* - all white except for a black mask, black wings and a hint of pale brown on the nape. The tail had a narrow black centre but no apparent terminal bar.

Two male Mourning Wheatears *O. lugens* - black face, throat and wings. One had a pale buff cap and nape and the other was pale grey with white edges. I found these best distinguished from the next species by the black 'T' tail with broad black terminal band. (Another distinguishing mark is the rusty under tail-coverts. Ed.) Two male and one female Pied Wheatears *O. pleschanka* - the males are very similar to the Mourning Wheatears but were distinguished by the black 'T' tail with the black extending up the outer tail feathers. Their wings appeared to be dark brown rather than black when seen close to, but this was not obvious at a distance. One of the males had the crown speckled with golden brown and was still moulting which made me wonder if it was a young bird just coming into full plumage. All were busily feeding on insects and one of the males was chasing the female. In the afternoon there were at least four males, including the one with the speckled crown, and a female. One male later flew into the wheelhouse and was caught and measured. Next day numbers had risen to eight males and one female. One male was pink, instead of white, below especially at the sides and tail: the rump was also slightly pink. On 6th there were four males and two females.

Next appeared a male Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* in beautiful condition with jet black head, red breast, white wing patch and white rump. Probably the same one was seen again in the afternoon. Next day three females were on board - similar but with a brown speckled head and back and chest a less bright red. One was noted to have a lighter brown head and a more orange breast. One female was present on 6 April.

I saw a black and white flycatcher - either a male Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* or possibly Semi-collared *F. semitorquata*; either could occur here but I was not close enough to see the distinguishing details.

One Swallow was seen in the morning but there were seven by the afternoon and three next day. On 6th there were five when they were noted with a chestnut tinge on the underparts. Most, if not all, were feeding on insects.

One female Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* was observed closely. It had no black rib, grey above with very bright yellow underpatch. Another was present but not seen well enough to determine its sex. The female was on board all day and, probably the same one, again all day on 5 April. One, possibly two, male Redstarts *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* of the western race with white belly, were catching insects and kept chasing the Grey Wagtail. Both species were aggressive towards the warblers. At least three Redstarts were on board later. Two were seen closely and one was very much brighter than the other and both had all the underside tinged with chestnut; one had an obscure white patch on the wing. One was seen also on board next day.

Two small warblers were on deck - green-brown above - which after careful observation I decided were Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus* on account of their pale brown legs. Similar, but with black legs, was a Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. No more Willow Warblers were seen but in the evening there were about 16 Chiffchaffs concentrated mainly on the poop where they were busily engaged in catching insects. They were very tame and took little notice of people walking about provided they did not go too close. While I was standing watching, one perched on my foot. Next day six were on board and four on 6 April.

A larger greeny-brown warbler with a slight eyestripe and large bill was present all day, also feeding. It was possibly an Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* and a similar one was seen on 6th.

One male Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* was very active catching insects. The head was rather variable grey with a much darker earpatch. It was attended closely by a female which I assumed was the same species. Two males were seen in the afternoon.

A male Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, easily identified by its jet black cap, was feeding on insects. I also saw a female with a rufous cap.

Lastly was seen a Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* - a plump pale

sandy bird with yellow legs, exactly as illustrated in Heinzel (p. 235). Another, slightly darker all over, was present next day; yet another on 6th was darker on the back than on the wings. All three were feeding and seemed to prefer a small species of moth. On 5th a Pied Wheatear was seen trying to rob one of a moth.

At 1610 H I took another walk round the ship. There were again a great many birds about including the following new species:

One Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* - pale brown with wings a little darker than the back, and pinkish below. Next day there were two.

One male Sykes's Yellow Wagtail *M. f. beema* was seen feeding. Its head was almost uniform blue-grey with white eyestripe and bright yellow underparts. I did not see this race again but next day two male Blue-headed Wagtails *M. f. flava* were on board.

Appearing larger, and not associating with the male Lesser Whitethroat were two probable female Whitethroats *Sylvia communis* (but the distinctive rufous was not noted on the wings—Ed.).

On 5 April, after so many different species on 4th, I did not hope for many new ones but, soon after daylight, the Chief Officer phoned me to say there was a most spectacular bird on board which turned out to be a Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. It was around all day and by late afternoon it had been joined by two others. By the evening next day there was a flock of at least 50 on board. The overall total during the period was considerably higher because several groups were seen to depart northwards. They were very noisy and extremely active, whirling about the ship after insects, and sometimes climbing to at least 2,000 feet. One was picked up dead early next day. I measured it and after showing it to my local bird club I sent it to the British Museum.

A Swift *A. apus* (or possibly Pallid Swift *A. pallidus*) circled the ship before continuing north, and an Alpine Swift *A. melba* overflew heading steadily north.

Larger and more lively than the Chiffchaffs, with a tinge of yellow below, were two probable Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina*.

A small brown bird annoyed me for some time by popping in and out from under winches on the poop, but eventually I managed to get a good view of it and identified it as a male Ortolan *Emberiza hortulana*. Next day there were three on board. These were not quite so elusive but always very skulking, squatting low on the deck and nearly always under cover. Even when hopping, they seemed to keep low. One was seen to eat a dragonfly.

On 6 April the birds were plentiful as ever and still more new species were seen. First a Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* flew over - mainly dark brown with a short square tail with white streaks thereon - and shortly afterwards a Pale Crag Martin *Hirundo obsoleta* arrived on board. This was similar in shape but was noticeably paler with a white chin and off-white underparts. A Crag Martin was also seen in the afternoon.

After lunch two large falcons arrived and settled on the fore-mast. I think they were the pale form of Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* but I could not be certain. Later in the afternoon a spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* was making sallies from a perch to catch insects.

While walking along the deck a male Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* swooped down close to me scattering the small birds and then shot upwards continuing north. I think it must have been aiming for a small bird but missed. It was sandy-grey-brown above with a white rump and black wing-tips. It still had bars on the tail which made me think it was a young bird. A female Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* was on board and two other probables were seen flying northwards. During the afternoon I also sighted three other raptors all flying north very high; one was a falcon, one a hawk and a larger one which could have been an eagle.

On 7 April we moved from the anchorage to the sea island berth 7 cables offshore on the other side of Kharg. Three Bee-eaters were on board, possibly some of the ones remaining from yesterday, one Turtle Dove, one Swallow and one male Lesser Whitethroat.

New species seen were a Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* - all black above except for a white 'V' on closed wings, white forehead, black mask and orange chest. The illustration in Heinzel *et al.* (p. 219) shows the tail to be white-edged when at rest but this was not very apparent. It was, however, obvious enough in flight. It stayed on board all day. Also present throughout was a male Red-backed Shrike of the eastern race *Lanius collurio phoenicuroides* with a pale chestnut cap instead of grey, and red-brown tail. (Note. Some authors, e.g. M. D. Gallagher *et al.*, consider the eastern races to be a distinct species of Isabelline Shrike *L. isabellinus* - in this case *L. i. phoenicuroides*.) A nightjar *Caprimulgus* sp. was on board but I was not able to get close enough to identify which species.

On the jetty, but also alighting on board, were 10 House Crows *Corvus splendens*. Black with a grey nape, they were rather smaller and more slender than a European Crow *C. corone*, with a heavy bill.

We sailed for Europe early on 9 April. During the morning a Swallow and a Turtle Dove were on board, and at lunch-time an immature Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* arrived and stayed for about an hour. It was dark brown above and underwing, and pale yellowish-brown with streaks on throat and chest (position 26°37 N 52°50 E - 26 miles offshore). Four or five Swallows were on board later and also a Swift or Pallid Swift.

So ended a remarkable few days.

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## SEABIRDS EXAMINED IN THE HAND

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

In order to obtain a reliable outline of birds' natural history and distribution it is necessary to obtain a certain number of checks on their identity and condition. In the past this was done by taking specimens, although this is usually no longer either practical or necessary. In consequence the information obtained when birds are examined in the hand has become particularly important, especially when backed up by good photographs, sketches and measurement. It is also useful if those birds which do die can be preserved. As a first step in bringing the back records up to date we are starting with those of seabirds examined in the hand.

There are a number of interesting reports covering some species which have seldom been examined, such as the so-called "Persian" Shearwater, actually a race of Audubon's Shearwater, and a particularly useful series of storm-petrels illustrating their winter quarters and moult. It should be noted that while some of the details requested merely confirm identifications, others, such as the wingspan, overall length and water-temperature-preference cannot be obtained from old museum specimens and provide useful new information, and we are tabulating this. It would be useful if we could also have more records of another important character of this type, the weight. It would also be helpful if we could sometimes have a few more confirmatory details for difficult species, including close-up photographs of the bills of prions and diving-petrels, and photographs or sketches of the rumps and tails of storm-petrels. It might be useful to make tracings of the outlines of the spread wing and tail of some of these birds on the recording forms.

## SEABIRDS EXAMINED IN THE HAND 1972-81

Species	Observer	Date	Location	Sea Temp. °C	Length mm	Wingspan mm	Notes
Fairy Prion <i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	J. W. Welch	7.3.76	45°S 62°E	11.0	250	500	Photo, feathers, parasites
Great-winged Petrel <i>Pterodroma macroptera</i>	M. R. Ryan	2.4.76	32°54'S 112°59'E				Photo
Jouanin's Petrel <i>Bulweria fallax</i>	J. W. Welch	29.9.81	ca 21°N 59°E	28.0	350	860	
Bulwer's Petrel <i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>	S. J. Hingston	1.10.75	17°32'N 163°35'E	28.7	270	655	Slide
Wedge-tailed Shearwater <i>Puffinus pacificus</i>	J. W. Waldie	20.8.72	19°30'N 159°47'W	24	457	965	Photo, pale phase
	S. J. Hingston	4.10.75	13°24'N 142°23'E	29.0	460	1050	Slide, pale phase
Audubon's Shearwater <i>P. therminieri</i>	G. H. Selby-Smith	30.4.75	18°52'N 59°43'E	28.7	292	610	Sketch
White-faced Storm-petrel <i>Pelagodroma marina</i>	J. W. Welch	15.5.75	39°S 138°E	14.6	178	406	Photo, feathers, parasites
	P. C. Dyer	30.12.80	39°S 130°E	17.0	190	340	Photos, moulting 4th primary
White-bellied Storm-petrel <i>Fregetta grallaria</i>	J. W. Welch	19.4.76	22°30'S 8°45'E	20.0	180	390	Photo, feathers, tarsus 40mm, toe 22mm
Wilson's Storm-petrel <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	M. K. Barratt	22.10.73	8°56'S 122°27'E				Yellow webs
	J. Bream	16.11.73	16°23'S 74°05'W	18.0	125	260	Yellow webs
	P. Coombs	16.12.74	0°33'N 25°04'W	26.5	180	380	Yellow webs (note date)
	P. Coombs	16.12.74	0°41'N 24°54'W	25.5	?	380	Yellow webs
Madeiran Storm-petrel <i>Oceanodroma castro</i>	P. Coombs	11.12.74	5°N 21°30'W	27.5	183	450	"White rump with no centre reduction"
	P. Coombs	10.1.75	4°55'N 22°23'W	27.5	195	440	"Wide white rump", some small ticks
	(M. G. Weir	9.10.80	10°S 3°W	20	198	450	White rump, shallow fork, uncertain?)
Leach's Storm-petrel <i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	P. Coombs	14.12.74	0°34'N 24°56'W	26.3	?	460	Grey centre rump, moult centre wing, tail
	P. Coombs	16.12.74	0°33'N 25°04'W	26.5	195	433	Grey centre rump
	P. Coombs	17.12.74	3°17'N 24°12'W	26.9	177	416	Grey centre rump, wing and tail short
	P. Coombs	6.1.75	9°02'N 21°09'W	27.3	190	420	Renewing 4-5 primaries
	P. Coombs	10.1.75	4°55'N 22°23'W	27.5	190	425	Four small red lice
	P. Coombs	10.1.75	4°55'N 22°23'W	27.5	194	425	Three long reddish lice
	P. Coombs	11.1.75	5°55'N 21°03'W	27.5	190	420	Short wing and tail, one primary missing
	P. Coombs	13.1.75	3°43'N 21°20'W	27.5	194	460	Fresh plumage
	P. Coombs	15.1.75	3°55'N 19°41'W	27.3	195	450	Plumage worn
	P. Coombs	16.1.75	6°08'N 20°19'W	27.4	?	430	Moulting outer tail; and two others
	P. Coombs	18.1.75	7°12'N 19°45'W	27.3	?	421	
	P. Coombs	20.1.75	7°25'N 16°15'W	28.8	195	422	With another
	P. W. G. Chilman	28.12.75	14°25'N 18°15'W	25	187	453	Dark centre rump, small parasite
	P. W. G. Chilman	30.12.75	9°06'N 17°32'W	30	215	446	Dark centre rump, seven others seen
	P. W. G. Chilman	30.12.75	6°24'N 15°29'W	30	198	450	Divided rump
	P. W. G. Chilman	13.1.76	4°14'N 13°21'W	28	194	450	Sketch rump, two kinds parasite
	P. W. G. Chilman	2.9.76	7°03'S 5°W	22	198	458	Dark centre rump, one primary missing
	P. W. G. Chilman	24.4.79	15°S 0°47'E	26.5	188	470	Dark centre rump
(R. R. Will		1.4.75	21°30'N 18°W	18	203	406	"Rump white", forked tail)
(R. R. Will		27.11.76	19°10'N 17°20'W	27.1	180	325	As before; 8 primaries
J. I. Owen		20.1.75	15°25'S 1°45'E	22	190	440	Grey centre rump, feather attached
A. R. Louch		29.10.81	23°54'N 17°24'W	21.8	190	300	Streaked rump, 8 primaries
A. R. Louch		29.10.81	24°01'N 17°18'W	19.2	170	200	White rump, forked tail, 6 primaries

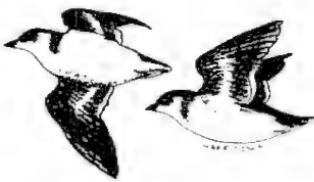
Species	Observer	Date	Location	Sea temp. °C	Length mm	Wingspan mm	Notes
	J. Booth	26.10.75	16°35'N 21°54'W				
	L. E. Howell	5.2.76	6°12'S 3°24'E				
	P. W. G. Chilman	24.10.81	0°12'N 10°00'W	27.0	201	470	Rump markings
	F. W. Lamb	5.11.75	46°N 9°W		165	420	Divided rump patch
	E. D. Macdonald	9.9.72	52°05'N 18°06'W	15.5	393	390	Sketch
	I. G. Hall	15.6.72	2°49'N 33°09'W	25.5	202	440	Sketch rump
	A. K. Dymock	9.2.75	19°N 51°W	26.1	193	432	Deep fork tail
	L. E. Howell	4.6.76	38°36'N 35°36'E		180	380	Photo
	T. W. D. John	8.3.75	19°04'N 127°10'E			400	White rump and torked tail; uncertain
	D. H. Moberley	14.6.72	23°31'N 112°32'W	22.7	168	353	Divided white rump
(Georgian?) Diving-petrel	P. Coombs	27.12.75	54°23'S 38°27'W	2.7	?	?	White rump, slightly forked tail
<i>Pelecanoides (georgicus)?</i>	J. W. Welch	7/8.3.76	47°S 72°E	7.0	205	400	Sketch bill suggests <i>P. georgicus</i> ?
Magellanic Diving-petrel <i>P. magellani</i>	P. Coombs	13.3.76	53°54'S 71°15'W	8.2	220	400	As above; also photo; feathers
Red-billed Tropic-bird <i>Phaethon aethereus</i>	P. J. C. Morgan	5.2.75	18°09'N 64°09'W	25	990	1028	Sketch; some lice
	S. J. Hingston	8.9.75	14°08'N 93°33'W	28.4	518	938	Sketch; mite seen
	P. W. G. Chilman	21.3.77	12°53'N 55°35'E	28	609	950	Slide; right wing, tail feather missing
	R. Massingham	16.4.75	17°55'S 3°24'E		500	750	Sketch; growing tail feather
Red-tailed Tropic-bird <i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>	D. J. Houghton	12.5.75	14°15'S 175°36'E				Orange bill
	T. E. Roberts	24.3.76	29°40'N 165°42'E				Photo - immature
White-tailed Tropic-bird <i>Phaethon lepturus</i>	M. Shakespeare	8.7.75	17°05'N 18°26'W	680	595	Sketch - immature?	
	I. M. Ward	3.3.76	4°56'N 98°48'E		675	775	Sketch
	P. Coombs	16.7.75	5°12'S 57°30'E	?	?	830	Sketch; central tail feather missing
Red-footed Booby <i>Sula sula</i>	P. W. G. Chilman	17.5.80	3°30'S 48°35'E	27	522	890	Moultling covers, outer tail; mites
	P. Coombs	24.7.75	9°S 51°10'E	?	?	1524	One of three; vomited fish; white
	P. W. G. Chilman	22.1.76	3°27'S 49°10'E	28	640	1380	Pale phase; parasites
	G. Barnes	1.8.74	Equator 49°E		505	1005	Sketch - all buff
	D. Isgo	18.10.75	7°27'S 31°37'W				Sketch
Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	P. Coombs	7.11.75	34°45'S 29°09'E	21.5	350	680	Sketch - summer adult, flew E
Bridled Tern <i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Mrs C. Roberts	7.12.81	15°20'N 73°50'E				Killed by hawk while at anchor, sketch
Sooty Tern <i>Sterna fuscata</i>	J. C. Thomson	12.10.74	14°22'S 68°56'E				Sketch
	P. Coombs	25.7.75	10°S 51°10'E	?	390	830	One of two, both had holes in webs
	P. Coombs	27.6.75	6°24'S 69°57'E	?	?	740	Hit aerial; sketch, feathers
	P. Coombs	1.8.75	10°48'S 50°15'E	24.9	432	843	Immature missing inner tail feather
	P. W. G. Chilman	26.2.76	2°46'S 9°14'W	29	378	818	After storm; moulting 2nd primaries
	P. W. G. Chilman	28.2.77	20°S 41°10'E	30	371	846	Sketch
	C. Elliott	14.10.75	4°42'S 28°36'W				Photos
	C. A. Howeson	26.11.73	11°45'N 74°05'W	37	400	764	Slide
	S. J. Hingston	14.11.75	7°38'N 106°42'E	27.3	380	840	Sketch, photo; also an immature
Black Noddy <i>Anous tenuirostris</i>	M. K. Barratt	25.4.74	7°38'N 106°42'E	27.2	327	625	Slide, Missing some wing, tail feathers
White Tern <i>Gygis alba</i>	S. J. Hingston	26.9.75	19°24'N 174°15'W	27	305	695	Photos, sketch
Little Auk <i>Alle alle</i>	E. D. Macdonald	30.12.73	52°30'N 19°48'W	11.3	212	366	Slides
	G. D. Sandecock	17.12.75	48°30'N 27°W	15.3	195	332	Slide; see <i>Sea Swallow</i> 30, page 66
Crested Auklet <i>Aethia cristatella</i>	S. J. Hingston	20.4.79	44°12'N 160°40'E	5.2	278	470	2 miles off Oman; winter plumage
Red-necked Phalarope <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	P. W. G. Chilman	4.2.76	23°40'N 58°32'E	25	170	323	

## OCEAN WEATHERSHIP SEABIRD REPORTS 1980/1981

By J. H. Agnew

The Ocean Weatherships *Admiral Beaufort* and *Admiral Fitzroy* which for many years have manned Station Lima are to be withdrawn in 1982 as a Government cost-saving measure. Their places will be taken in future by the Dutch weathership *Cumulus* and a chartered fishing trawler *Starella*. The accompanying summary of seabird sightings cover the period from December 1979 to December 1981. This provides a continuous record from the last published summary in 1980, see *Sea Swallow* 29: 14-15, but with the exception of the months September to November 1980 and January and February 1981 which have been omitted due to lack of data. The observations are unique in that they give a continuous series of regular daily observations from an essentially static (geographically!) observation point in the open ocean. Station Lima is 400 miles WNW of Ireland 400 miles south of Iceland. The format and key are the same as in earlier summaries and indicate occasional sightings (average 1 bird per day), sightings between 1 and 49 birds per day and sightings of 50 or more per day.

The daily counts in Table I (December 1979 to August 1980) total 11,950 sightings of Fulmars, of which 2% were blue phase birds; 6,540 Kittiwakes of which 13% were immature; 710 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 20% immature; and 190 Great Black-backed Gulls, 40% immature. No sightings of Ivory Gull, Common Gull or Little Auk were recorded.



Little Auk.

In Table II (March to December 1981) the daily counts total 10,020 sightings of Fulmars, of which 5% were blue phase birds; 5,610 Kittiwakes of which 32% were immature; 400 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 17% immature; and 240 Great Black-backed Gulls, 41% immature. No sightings of Leach's Storm-petrel, Ivory Gull, Common Gull, Iceland Gull or Sabine's Gull were reported.

Once again the RNBWS are greatly indebted to the following officers and staff who have maintained the continuity of these useful observations: R. C. L. Aran, R. Basingthwaite, A. Britain, R. Burness, D. E. C. Hampton, L. Hunter, D. A. McKenzie, Captain G. Mathison and J. K. Thompson.

Table 1. OCEAN WEATHER SHIP OBSERVATIONS  
 SUMMARY OF SEABIRD SIGHTINGS, STATION LIMA (57°N, 20°W)  
 December 1979 to August 1980

	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Fulmar	x	x	o	o	o	x	x	o	x
Great Shearwater									
Sooty Shearwater					—		—		—
Manx Shearwater					—		—		—
Wilson's Storm-petrel					—		—		—
British Storm-petrel							—	—	—
Leach's Storm-petrel							—	—	—
Gannet	—	—	—		—	o	o	—	o
Great Skua	—	—	—	—	o	—	—	—	o
Pomarine Skua						—	—		—
Arctic Skua						—	—		—
Long-tailed Skua						—	—		—
Herring Gull	—								—
Lesser Black-backed Gull				—	o	o	o	—	o
Greater Black-backed Gull	o	o	—	—	—	o	—	—	—
Glaucous Gull	—								
Iceland Gull	—								
Kittiwake	o	o	x	o	o	o	o	—	o
Sabine's Gull									—
Black-headed Gull	—	—			—	—			—
Arctic Tern							—	—	o
Common Tern									—
Roseate Tern								—	—
Guillemot					—		—	—	—
Razorbill						—	—	—	—
Puffin							—	—	—
Bulwer's Petrel								—	
<b>Key</b>	— Occasional sightings				o Average 1-49 per day			x Average 50 or more per day	

Table II. OCEAN WEATHER SHIP OBSERVATIONS  
 SUMMARY OF SEABIRD SIGHTINGS, STATION LIMA (57°N, 20°W)  
 February 1981 to December 1981

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Fulmar	o	o	x	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Great Shearwater	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sooty Shearwater	—	—	—	—	—	o	—	—	—	—	—
Manx Shearwater	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wilson's Storm-petrel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Storm-petrel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gannet	—	—	o	—	—	—	o	—	—	—	—
Great Skua	o	—	o	—	—	—	—	o	—	—	—
Pomarine Skua	—	—	o	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arctic Skua	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Long-tailed Skua	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Herring Gull	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lesser Black-backed Gull	—	—	o	o	o	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Black-backed Gull	—	o	—	o	—	o	o	—	—	—	—
Glaucous Gull	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kittiwake	x	o	x	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Black-headed Gull	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arctic Tern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Common Tern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Little Tern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Little Auk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Guillemot	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Razorbill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Puffin	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Key — Occasional sightings    o Average 1-49 per day    x Average 50 or more per day

Incidences of oiled birds feature in the remarks accompanying the observations. For instance Captain G. Mathison reports a badly oil-stained Kittiwake, first seen on 1 March 1980; it was being mobbed in flight and on the water, remained with them, flying around the ship intermittently and then alighting behind the windlass to carry out continual preening. Although it occasionally took food scraps, attempts to capture and clean the bird failed. On two occasions it was attacked by other Kittiwakes. Finally, unable to cope with very strong winds, it disappeared on the night of 4/5 March. The same observer reported that on 9 May a Storm-petrel collided with the bulkhead of the balloon shed. Its head was noted to be oil-fouled.

On 27 June 1980 an immature Gannet was seen to be quite heavily oiled in patches on its neck, back and breast. It stayed in the water close to the stationary ship preening itself, and could be seen to be almost gagging at times. An adult Great Skua made a couple of pecking dives at the oiled bird which finally flew off to the west (DAMcK).

In June 1980, 2 terns (probably Arctic Terns) were watched mobbing an Arctic Skua, the terns pecking at the skua from all directions with angry cries. After about 5 minutes the skua flew off over the horizon closely pursued by the terns (DAMcK).

Another demonstration of aggressive behaviour, also noted by DAMcK, concerned a Great Skua. On 16 August 1980 AB's reported that a Great Skua singled out a solitary Fulmar on the sea close to the vessel's quarter. The skua landed on the Fulmar's back and pecked at the frantic bird's head. After about 10 minutes of this behaviour the skua took off leaving behind a wings-outstretched bundle of feathers and almost immediately proceeded with the same treatment to another Fulmar. DAMcK commented that he has witnessed harassment by skuas to obtain food, but has not before heard of such deliberate or pointless murder.

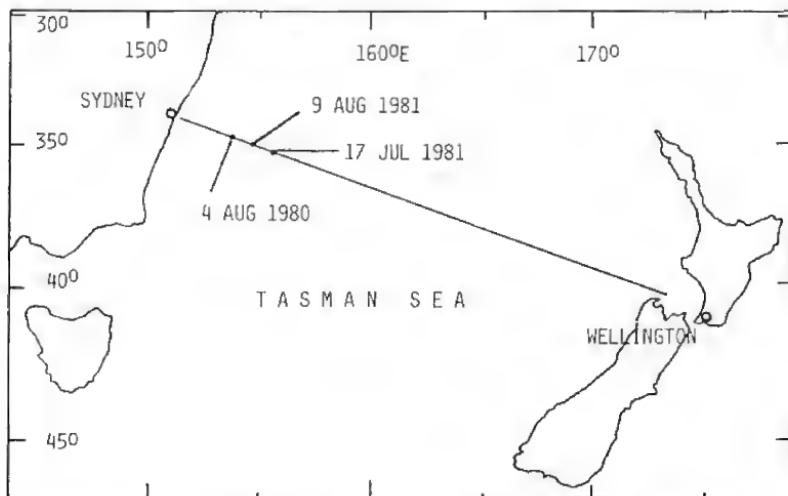
Finally, in a lighter vein, also in June 1980 DAMcK reported 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls that sat on the fo'c'sle head all night. In the early morning light, when one of them landed beside a bread scrap thrown from the bridge, there was a sudden disturbance of the water just behind the gull. With frantic wing movements it managed to take off just as a procession of 9 black fins broke the surface—a school of Blue Sharks. The bird spent the rest of the day flying about staring at the source of supply with an angry indignant look and refused further offerings.

## A NOTE ON THE WINTER DISTRIBUTION OF THE WHITE-HEADED PETREL

By J. A. F. Jenkins

W. B. Alexander in *Birds of the Ocean* stated that the range of the White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessoni* is north to about latitude 33°S. It would be interesting to know on what information he based this statement and also whether he was aware of the apparent wintering ground used by these petrels in the Tasman Sea as suggested by recent observations.

During a crossing of the Tasman Sea, from Sydney to Wellington (see map), on 4 August 1980, the expected small numbers of White-headed Petrels were sighted. However, between 1615 and 1630 rafts of at least 100 and at least 50 were seen, while at the same time about 20 were flying around the ship. A similar concentration was seen on 17 July 1981, when between 1100 and 1145 a flock of at least 100 were seen feeding, and a further flock of 150 were feeding and rafted. In addition a seagoing birdwatcher reports having encountered at least 100 in this area on 8 August 1981. These observations, summarised in the table below, were made at almost the same time of the year and about 60 miles apart. It is from this evidence that the area is suggested as a winter feeding ground of this petrel.



Map: Winter sightings of White-headed Petrels *Pterodroma lessoni*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Local Time</i>	<i>Ship's Position</i>	<i>Number of Birds</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
4 Aug 1980	1000	34°09'S 152°16'E	1	Course 111°T
	1030		2	Speed 16kt.
	1530	34°41'S 153°51'E	3	Sea temp. 18.3°C
	1540		4	
	1615-1630	34°45'S 154°04'E	100+, 50+, 20	Sea temp. 18.3°C
	1700		Nil	
17 Jul 1981	1030	35°01'S 154°54'E	1	Course 110°T.
	1100		1	Speed 15.3kt.
	1130-1145	35°05'E 155°10'E	100+, 150+	
	1200		12	
	1300	35°05'S 155°10'E	2	
8 Aug 1981	1315	34°54'S 154°42'E	100+	

A similar series of observations was made in the Great Australian Bight when on passage from Fremantle towards Adelaide on 27 July 1971. Few birds were seen in the morning; one at 0800 (35°13'S 131°54'E) and 3 at 1145. Then in the afternoon between 1400-1500 17 were counted, and between 1500-1600 20+ (1600 position 35°18'S 133°52'E). At 1700 there were 8 in sight. On this occasion all these birds were flying in a southerly direction directly across our course.

These birds are regularly seen in ones and twos throughout the Tasman Sea and New Zealand coastal waters in the southern winter (Cheshire and Jenkins in prep.). At this time they may be found to the north of New Zealand, and well north of 33°S\*. They are rarely seen in larger numbers and this is apparently true even near the breeding islands. In May 1981 close to the Auckland Islands (51°S 166°E) we rarely saw more than 6 together, and assumed that the birds had already moved northwards. However, we subsequently found this to be wrong. On the night of 10 May 1981 H.M.N.Z.S. *Monowai* was anchored in the western arm of Cranley Harbour, a mile or so from the White-headed Petrels' breeding ground at Adams Island. At approximately 2200 the deck floodlights, which had been kept off to discourage birds boarding, were put on for about ten minutes. In the light we could see what appeared to be several hundred White-headed Petrels, together with many other birds around the ship. Later 34 of these petrels were collected from the decks and released. It seems therefore that there were large numbers about the island even though we had recorded few offshore.

It would be interesting to know if anyone else has seen concentrations of *P. lessoni* similar to those seen in the Tasman Sea and Great Australian Bight.

\* Editor's note. W. Weitkowitz recorded a few at 30°S 154°E in August (*Sea Swallow* 30:54) and in the Indian Ocean K. Salwegter recorded these petrels in the same latitude in September (*Sea Swallow* 24:72).

Captain J. A. F. Jenkins, 14 Lochiel Road, Remuera, Auckland.

THE WRECKS OF PRIONS, BLUE AND  
KERGUELEN PETRELS IN THE SOUTHERN OCEAN  
IN AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1981

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

Wrecks of a variety of seabirds are periodically reported in the higher latitudes of both hemispheres, and variously attributed to the weather, pollution, disease or food-failures. Sometimes they are observed over a wide area, as with the wrecks of Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* in the late 1960s (*Journal of Wildlife Management* 40:789-792, 1976), but this has seldom been fully investigated. It may therefore be useful to compare two reports of their occurrence in South Africa and New Zealand in the southern spring of 1981.

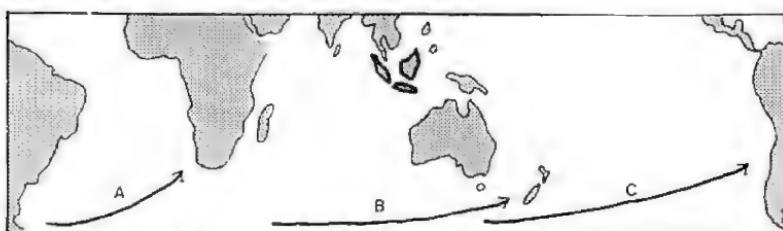
Some scores of prions *Pachyptila* sp. and a few birds of other species, including two Blue Petrels *Halobaena caerulea*, were first found on South African beaches after a spell of southerly winds in the second half of August, when some which were weighed were found to be only half to two-thirds their normal weight (A. L. Batchelor, *Cormorant* 9:105-112, 1981 Table 1). Some days later, in early September, hundreds of Blue and Kerguelen Petrels *Pterodroma brevirostris* also started to appear with strong southwest winds and heavy rain in New Zealand, where those which came ashore also appeared to be starving (S. Reed, *Notornis* 28:239-240, 1981). A total of 27 Blue and 26 Kerguelen Petrels were eventually dissected, and a majority of 17 of each found to be males. All except one Kerguelen Petrel had the ends of the tibiae fused, and must have been full grown, but only one male of each species and three female Blue Petrels were coming into breeding condition, and the rest may have been immature; it is a pity another indication of age, the bursa of Fabricius, does not appear to have been examined.

All the birds dissected except two Blue Petrels had squid beaks in their stomachs, and all the Blue Petrels also had plastic pellets among other debris, although only one Kerguelen Petrel contained a plastic pellet; it was therefore deduced that while the Blue Petrels may feed by picking objects from the water surface, the Kerguelen Petrels, which belong to a genus that specialises in catching squids when they come to the surface at night, do not do so. These pellets which form a raw material of the plastics industry are now found increasingly widely in seabird stomachs throughout the world (including a Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata* on Gough Island in the central South Atlantic), and there has been some speculation whether they obstruct the birds' digestion and affect their performance on migration (*Marine Pollution Bulletin* 13:18-21, 1982). It might be useful if more people looked inside birds' stomachs.

An attempt was made to identify the South African prions using a recent review by J. B. Cox (*Rec. S. Austr. Mus.* 18:91-121,

1980), who unfortunately was unable to tell them apart and lumped them all into three species, so it may also be useful to consider this further. The average dimensions of the most distinct of the many forms described are compared with those of the birds reported in South Africa in Table 1. It will be seen that while the largest race of Broad-billed Prion and the smallest race of Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur* are easily separable on their measurements, the Narrow-billed Prions *P. belcheri* show much variation in the bill and wing, and the supposed example of a "Medium-billed Prion" *P. salvini* agrees more closely with the rare form *macgillivrayi* from St Paul Island. This is usually regarded as a race of Broad-billed Prion. In view of the occurrence of much overlap I consider that all three forms are probably better regarded as races of one species.

The main body of the South African birds could from their measurements either be true "Medium-billed Prions" or examples of the nominate race of Dove Prion *P. d. desolata* which breeds alongside it at the southern Indian Ocean islands. Normally these birds are best told apart by the bill structure of the adults, as described by R. A. Falla and C. A. Fleming (*Emu* 40:218-236, 41:134-155, 1940-41), but this is not discussed. An examination of the measurements shows that many are rather small, which suggests that the birds were immature, but that the wings were usually rather long, which suggests that these birds might also be the large southern population of Dove Prion *P. d. banksi* breeding around Antarctica and in the Scotia Sea. These birds appear to migrate north. A frequency distribution graph also indicates that there may have been another smaller group of birds with shorter wings whose presence is masked in the combined figures, which may belong to the population from the southern Indian Ocean islands which normally appears to migrate into the Pacific.



#### Origin of seabirds wrecked in west wind zone of Southern Ocean

A — Prions and Blue Petrels which may have come largely from South Atlantic found in South Africa in late August 1981. B — Blue and Kerguelen Petrels from the southern Indian Ocean found in New Zealand in early September 1981. C — Southern Indian Ocean prions found in western South America in 1969.

TABLE 1. MEASUREMENTS OF PRIONS *PACHYPTILA* sp.

<i>Species</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Culmen</i>		<i>Wing</i>	<i>Tail</i>	<i>Tarsus</i>	<i>Toe</i>	<i>Weight</i>
		<i>Lgth</i>	<i>Bdth</i>					
<b>Broad-billed Prion <i>P. vittata</i> and "Medium-billed Prion" <i>P. (v.) salvini</i></b>								
<i>P. v. vittata</i> : Tristan-Gough group, New Zealand Chatham Is.	52	33.7	20.6	206	103	35.7	39.7	174
<i>P. v. macgillivrayi</i> : St Paul Id.	14	31.4	17.4	198	96	34.9	39.1	—
<i>P. v. salvini</i> : Crozet and Marion Is.	14	29.9	15.3	192	95	33.7	37.8	156
<b>Dove Prion <i>P. desolata</i>.</b>								
<i>P. d. desolata</i> : Auckland, Maquarie, Kerguelen, Crozet Is.	32	26.8	13.8	181	90	32.7	36.1	160
<i>P. d. banksi</i> : Heard, S. Georgia, S. Orkney Is.	39	27.8	14.9	192	96	33.7	38.5	159
<b>Narrow-billed Prion <i>P. belcheri</i>.</b>								
<i>P. belcheri</i> : Falkland, Crozet, Kerguelen Is.	22	24.6	10.8	183	91	33.1	38.5	135
<b>Fulmar Prion <i>P. crassirostris</i>.</b>								
<i>P. c. crassirostris</i> : Chatham, Snares, Bounty Is.	44	23.4	11.9	189	94	33.3	40.7	—
<i>P. c. eatoni</i> : Auckland, Heard Is.	38	22.0	11.5	180	92	32.7	39.7	—
<b>Fairy Prion <i>P. turtur</i>.</b>								
<i>P. t. turtur</i> : Bass St., New Zealand	26	22.7	11.0	178	86	31.7	37.6	132
<i>P. t. huttoni</i> : Snares, Chatham, Antipodes (Campbell ?, Macquarie ?), Crozet, Marion, S. Georgia, Falkland Is.	55	21.3	10.3	176	90	31.9	37.5	132
<b>Specimens beached in South Africa</b>								
<i>P. v. vittata</i>	1	36.0	21.4	212	—	38.4	36.5	157
" <i>P. v. salvini</i> " = <i>P. v. macgillivrayi</i> ?	1	31.0	17.0	—	—	36.3	33.4	—
<i>P. belcheri</i>	3	20.1	10.1	169	—	32.2	31.4	102
		20.9	9.6	180	—	31.4	31.7	—
		26.3	10.0	182	—	32.8	31.9	—
" <i>P. turtur</i> " = <i>P. t. huttoni</i> ?	2	20.1	9.4	177	—	31.8	32.0	98
		22.7	9.8	—	—	32.0	32.8	—
" <i>P. v. desolata</i> " = mainly <i>P. d. banksi</i> some <i>P. d. desolata</i> and <i>P. v. salvini</i> ?	26	25.9	13.0	186	—	32.2	31.4	102
Mean and range given.		23.7	11.5	179	—	32.1	29.1	81
		27.6	14.5	197	—	34.7	33.0	105

Personal measurements of breeding birds; details will be published elsewhere. Those for South Africa taken from A. L. Batchelor, *Cormorant* 9:105-112, all in mm. Comparative weights from B. Despin *et al.*, *C.N.F.R.A.* 31, and M. K. Swales, *Ibis* 107:17-42, in grams.

Thus it appears that a series of south-west gales which were probably moving east in the Southern Ocean brought first a limited number of southern Dove Prions and a variety of other strays from the South Atlantic to South Africa, and then larger numbers of Blue and Kerguelen Petrels which must have originated in the southern Indian Ocean to New Zealand; in other years such as 1969 they have also swept large numbers of "Medium"- and Narrow-billed Prions from the same area on to Chile and Peru (P. W. Post in prep.). The birds appear to have been starving and to have eaten some inappropriate things by the time that they came ashore, though it is not yet clear which of the factors concerned is cause, and which effect.

Many of the victims are immature, and their bodies in poor condition and hard to identify by the time they are retrieved, but with adequate care and comparative material it can usually be done, especially if some of their wings and heads are retained for further study, and together with dissection of the bodies this can yield much useful information. Ill-informed attempts to simplify matters by lumping all the birds together under the same name are not always helpful here.

## IDENTIFICATION OF SOOTY AND SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATERS IN THE NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN

By Terence R. Wahl

The identification of Sooty Shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* and Short-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus tenuirostris* in the field poses problems. Many birds cannot be separated satisfactorily under all conditions of observation (i.e. lighting, weather, distance) and even under ideal conditions some are uncertain. Observers in the North Pacific and the South Pacific appear to be unfamiliar with what these species may look like in the opposite hemisphere and season. The effects of moult, feather wear, etc. on identification are largely unknown. These notes are based on experience, chiefly from April to October, in the North Pacific and Bering Sea comparing the two species directly in the field, not as specimens in the hand.

**Body size and shape** Short-tail appears slimmer than Sooty. When flocks of Short-tails are flushed from the surface, an accompanying Sooty stands out by being more stocky, heavy-set. Short-tail appears to have a smaller head and, in direct comparison, a shorter bill.

**Wing** Short-tail appears to have narrower wing in relation to length than Sooty.

**Wing-beat** Short-tail slightly faster, though rate of wing stroke and flight style is of course tremendously variable due to wind force, direction and the birds' behaviour.

**Flight style** Wind strength and direction are critical. Short-tail appears more agile and limber-winged, and can turn more sharply in close quarters. I have been unable to see any difference in bend of wing, etc., described in some Field Guides.

**Underwing** Almost all Field Guides are more hindrance than help here. Short-tail underwings appear to me to be two or three shades lighter than upper-parts, usually smoothly coloured grey, evenly outlined with dark brown/blackish, unlike the whitish/silvery flash of Sooty. Short-tail is NOT as dark underwing as on the upper-parts. However, due to light and angle this character is often not of much value in identification. Further, moult changes this greatly. On occasions both species may appear very light underwing due to moult and very great individual variation is possible.

**Head shape** Sooty has forehead sloping to the base of the bill, Short-tail head is rounder, with forehead meeting the bill at almost a right angle. (Similar to the comparison of head-to-bill profile of the Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* and Common Gull *Larus canus*).

**Colouration** Short-tail appears more evenly coloured above than Sooty, almost velvety appearance (October), lacking the more mottled appearance of Sooty. Short-tail is more blackish-brown and Sooty lighter brown. Short-tail head (October) appears to have a clearly defined blackish cap. Short-tail often shows rather sharply defined whitish "chin" patch. Sooty has a less well-defined light area.

**Behaviour** Sooties eagerly approach working fishing vessels for discards, and can be chummed to small vessels. However, when no such attraction was present, we observed several times, at a stopped small vessel surrounded by large numbers of Sooties, that the odd one or two Short-tails present would very likely approach the vessel more closely, or remain close and flush more reluctantly long after the Sooties had done so. It is almost a rule that a lone, dark shearwater swimming toward a stopped vessel off the U.S. west coast should be suspected as a Short-tail !

The above features were noticeable at relatively close range, usually when the vessel was stopped and most are qualitative rather than definitive. In summary, many birds seen from bridge levels of large vessels are probably impossible to identify with certainty, particularly when only one species is present.

**Distribution** It now appears that Short-tails are found in colder waters during the northern summer than Sooties, except while migrating, of course. It is likely that dark shearwaters observed in the Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk are predominantly Short-tails, while birds apparently summering in the southern subarctic Pacific are predominantly Sooties. Short-tails appear to be uncommon though somewhat variable along the Pacific coast of North America whereas Sooties are abundant.

Dr V. Morejohn has reported *pers. comm.*, taking intergrade Sooty x Short-tailed at Monterey Bay, California, in the fall. This implies further complications in the identification problem.

#### Distribution of other shearwaters

Observers crossing the subarctic North Pacific in spring through fall, particularly on tracks between Japan and the North American west coast, are likely to encounter additional species. These are:

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* (near colonies in summer, further south in winter); Streaked Shearwater *Puffinus leucomelas* (chiefly in coastal Japan waters); Flesh-footed Shearwaters *P. carneipes* (patchily across the Pacific, with small numbers off the North American west coast); Pink-footed Shearwater *P. creatopus* (essentially coastal between British Columbia and Southern California in summer); Buller's Shearwater *P. bulleri* (widespread in mid-Pacific, with numbers off the British Columbia to Southern California coast in August-October); and Manx Shearwater *P. puffinus* (off Southern California chiefly in fall and winter).

In addition, two medium to large-size dark gadfly petrels which might be confused initially with shearwaters also occur seasonally. Solander's Petrel *Pterodroma solandri* occurs widely across the North Pacific (Nakamura and Tanaka, 1977 *Misc. Rep. Yamashina Inst. Ornith.* Vol 9 (1):112-120), occasionally at least to the northern Gulf of Alaska (T. R. Wahl, unpub. data), and off Northern California (R. L. Pitman, unpub. data), and recent records suggest Murphy's Petrel *Pterodroma ultima* occurs also (R. L. Pitman, T. R. Wahl, unpub. notes). The only other widespread *Pterodroma* likely is the distinctively different Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata*.

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### THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE MANX AND FLUTTERING SHEARWATERS

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

The classification of a group of medium-sized black-and-white shearwaters of temperate seas has long presented a problem. In Europe three rather different forms have traditionally been treated as races of the Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus*, whereas their counterparts in the Pacific were regarded as up to four distinct species until R. C. Murphy added them to the races of Manx Shearwaters in 1952 (*Am. Mus. Novit.* 1586). Passage of time has now revealed further differences between some of them, however, notably between two forms which have only recently begun to receive attention in Australasia, the Fluttering and Hutton's Shearwaters *P. gavia* and *P. huttoni*. Since I was able to observe them

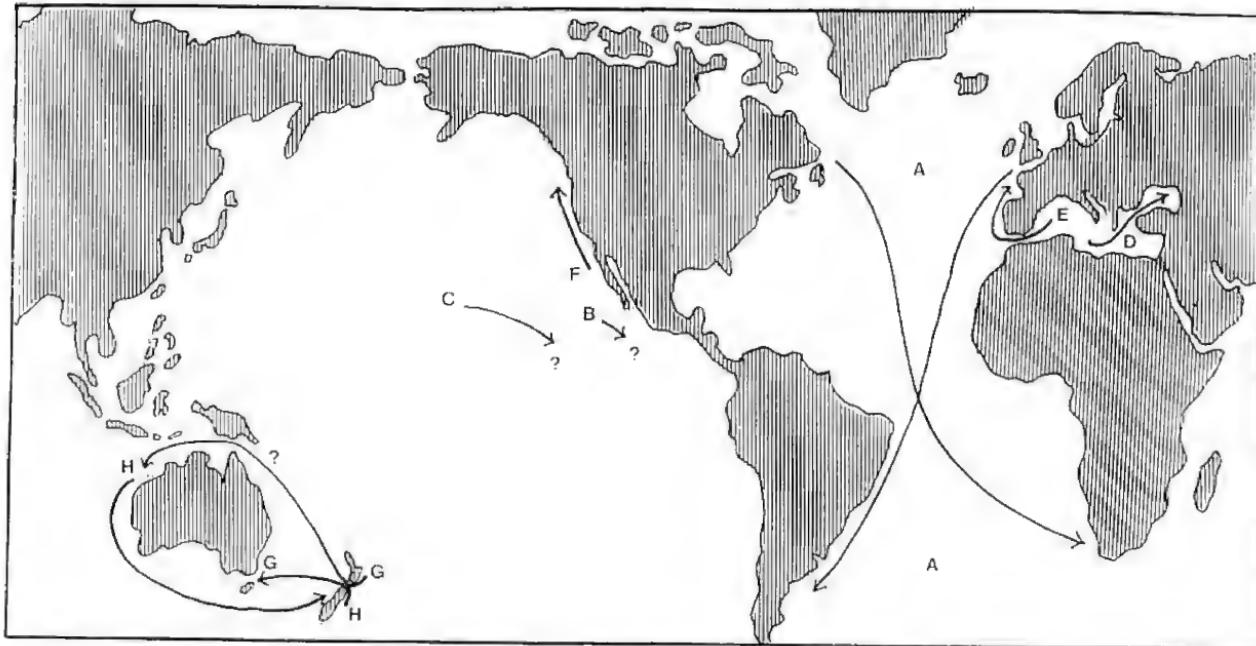
together in August and September 1974 it may be useful to record some comments.

The Fluttering Shearwater is a rather clumsy short-winged, brown-backed representative of the Manx Shearwaters which breeds on the offshore islands around New Zealand, where it behaves rather similarly, and then together with some other local seabirds disperses to south-east Australia at other times, feeding in compact flocks over fishing-shoals along the coast and in inlets such as the Marlborough Sounds and Port Philip. Hutton's Shearwater is darker on the back, underwing and side of the tail, and may have been overlooked in the past because it tends to disperse out to sea, for example off the Banks Peninsula and Sydney. Its breeding-place on the top of the mountains behind the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand was only reported as recently as 1965 by G. Harrow (*Notornis* 12:59-65, 23:269-288), and its winter quarters off the opposite, north-west coast of Australia by S. Halse in 1981, when John Warham postulated that it might migrate anticlockwise around Australia (*Emu* 81:42-44), a proposition which still requires more proof if anyone should chance to pass through the Torres Strait about May.

One possible interpretation of this situation is that while the Fluttering Shearwater enjoys a fairly constant food supply along the coast, Hutton's Shearwater, which has a longer, narrower bill, is dependant on smaller fish and plankton occurring in seasonal areas of upwelling and raised marine productivity due to the development of offshore winds further out to sea. It may move from one such area with the south-east monsoon around northern Australia for the winter, and then back to another with the westerlies in the Southern Ocean for the summer (see map). If this is so it must incidentally be a comparatively recent development in evolutionary terms, since apparently while the upwelling off western Australia was stronger the Arafura Sea was dry in the Pleistocene, so that any movement through the Torres Strait is likely to have originated within the last 15,000 years.

The same phenomenon is also distinguishable on a much larger scale among the six representatives of this group of shearwaters, in the northern hemisphere (see map), referred to here without prejudice to their classification, as follows:

1. Three brown-backed coastal forms make a limited movement north in pursuit of shoaling fish while they moult in the late summer, including the Levantine Shearwater *yelkouan* which breeds on the central Mediterranean islands and reaches the northern Black Sea, the Balearic Shearwater *mauretanicus* which breeds in the western Mediterranean and moves north up the west coast of Europe as far as the English Channel, and the Black-vented Shearwater *opisthomelas* which breeds off the coast of California and moves north up the west coast of North America as far as British Columbia.



#### Distribution of Manx, Black-vented, Fluttering and Hutton's Shearwaters

Arrows show direction of movement from the breeding-places. A — Manx Shearwater *P. p. puffinus* (mainly western Europe migrating to eastern South America, only small numbers eastern North America and southwest Africa). B — Townsend's Shearwater *P. (p.) auricularis* (may be sedentary?). C — Newell's Shearwater *P. (p.) newelli* (winter quarters uncertain). D — Levantine Shearwater *P. (y.) yelkouan*. E — Balearic Shearwater *P. (y.) mauretanicus*. F — Black-vented Shearwater *P. (y.) opisthomelas*. G — Fluttering Shearwater *P. gavia*. Hutton's Shearwater *P. huttoni* (route followed remains to be proved).

2. Three black-backed pelagic forms breed at more or less oceanic islands and may move south to moult in the winter, including the Manx Shearwater *puffinus* which now breeds all round the North Atlantic (having recently colonised eastern North America) and winters all across the South Atlantic, and two close allies, Townsend's Shearwater *auricularis* which breeds on the Revilla Gigedos Islands off western Mexico, and Newell's Shearwater *newelli* which breeds on Hawaii, both of which may winter in the eastern tropical Pacific.

It is arguable that the members of each of the last two groups might be treated as races of single species under the first name, comparable to the two rather distinct species in New Zealand, but there is a need for much more detailed knowledge of such characters as their behaviour and distribution to determine quite how similar they really are, and it might be useful if anyone who has a chance to observe several forms (or members of the rather similar complex of smaller Little Shearwaters of the *Puffinus assimilis-lherminieri-heinrothi* group, which presents similar problems) were to examine them comparatively from this point of view. Points which deserve particular attention include the collection of good recordings of all their voices, and information about their range and feeding behaviour in the less-well-known areas such as the tropical Pacific, where they may have been overlooked among wintering populations of the more numerous pale phase of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*.

## POTENTIAL RECORDS OF NEW EUROPEAN SEABIRDS

By S. E. Chapman

While it is clearly necessary to scrutinise reports of rare birds with extreme scepticism, the outright rejection of total novelties has the disadvantage that observers may never become aware of new possibilities and learn to identify them. From time to time we encounter unusual reports which, while they may not be totally conclusive in themselves, raise the possibility that species are occurring in new areas where they are being overlooked, so that it seems desirable to give warning of their potential appearance and what to look for. We have therefore put a series of these reports together, although for various reasons it needs to be understood that they cannot all be considered fully authenticated and are being published mainly as an indication of developing trends. Any subsequent records of the same type will be considered on their individual merits for publication mainly on the basis of their educational value.

The first note concerning a giant petrel by Bernard King in 1967 is interesting because it pre-dates the first European record (P.

Meeth, *Ardea* 57:92) of a giant petrel by just 13 days. It is tempting to conclude that this was the same bird that P. Meeth saw. The sketch and notes in *Ardea* refer to a bird with "head and sides of neck whitish showing some dark spots on the nape and ear coverts". Bernard King's bird however is described as "all medium brown except for a pale front to the head . . ." which implies that it was the other species, though it could also have been immature.

Keith Verrall's petrel, skua and tern records are one of the rewards (or frustrations) of many hours' systematic sea watching. We reproduce here a copy of the page from his field note book which one is bound to admit shows a convincing likeness of a giant petrel at a time when he had not yet identified the bird, and of course underlines the importance of taking such notes at the time. Even the casual observer needs to adopt this discipline in recording birds at sea.

In the third note Dr Bourne describes some background to the two giant petrel notes and expands the reasoning why these sightings are not thought to relate to the same bird or to the occurrences of Black-browed Albatrosses in the late 1960s. Dr Bourne's note goes on to describe sightings which suggest the occurrence of the South Polar Skua on the east side of the North Atlantic, and the need to be aware of the western North Atlantic race of the Iceland Gull *Larus glaucopterus kumlienii* which also apparently occurs occasionally in the eastern Atlantic.

### A GIANT PETREL NEAR THE WOLF ROCK, CORNWALL

By Bernard King, R.N.B.W.S., M.A.O.U.

On the morning of 20 October 1967 in boisterous weather with rather rough seas and occasional brilliant sun a number of birders including Enid and Keith Allsop, Roy Curber, Keith Fox and Harry Robinson were watching seabirds from the stern of the S.S. *Queen of the Isles* while returning from the Isles of Scilly. As we crossed the familiar seabird flight path in the vicinity of the Wolf Rock approaching Cornwall we saw many Gannets *Sula bassana* of various ages and 68 Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis*, some of which came within 50 yards of us. Then about half a mile astern I discovered an extremely large seabird about the size of a Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*, which I had seen three months before on the Bass Rock. As it approached I therefore exclaimed that it must be an albatross, but then realised it was a large, ungainly-looking seabird the like of which none of us had previously encountered. Unfortunately the Allsops did not appear to secure clear views, while Harry Robinson may have been looking at something else, because he thought it was an immature Gannet.

When this bird began mixing with a number of Great Shearwaters about a quarter of a mile away it made them and indeed Gannets nearby look small. Its plumage appeared medium brown except for a pale front to the head and a lighter area under the wings. These were long and fairly narrow, especially in relation to the body size. It was heavy-headed, thick-necked, and had a very bulky body, which narrowed somewhat towards the fan-shaped tail. The bill was large, and seen side on appeared truncated and deep at the base with an ugly nasal tube. I thought the bill was dull dirty yellow, and Keith Fox thought it was dirty pale whitish. In general it resembled a huge but ungainly Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. After following the ship it veered away and settled among the main party of shearwaters, where it was lost in the turbulent seas astern as we approached the mainland.

The bird was eventually identified as a giant petrel *Macronectes* sp. on consultation with W. B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean* (1928) and the discussion of albatross identification in the North Atlantic by J. Warham, W. R. P. Bourne and H. F. I. Elliott (*British Birds* 59:376-384). We did not put the record forward formally at the time because one of the observers thought that the bird was a young Gannet. Since we recently noticed that the first giant petrel for the North Atlantic was subsequently recorded by P. Meeth off Ushant, north-west France, only 13 days later (*Ardea* 57:92) it may be useful to place the observation on record now.

B. King, Gull Cry, 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Cornwall.

#### THE OCCURRENCE OF A LARGE PETREL, A PALE GREAT SKUA AND A LARGE TERN OFF ISLAY

By Keith Verrall

Between May 1973 and December 1977 I spent a total of 404 hours on 154 days watching birds passing the southwest point of Islay, Rubha na Faing, at the southern extremity of the Inner Hebrides 25 miles north of Ireland, where southbound bird movements come to a climax. During this time I saw 173,938 birds pass, 91% of them going south, as discussed elsewhere (*Scottish Birds* 12(1):3-11). The majority occurred with west winds, when the rate of passage reached maxima of 6,600 auks, 3,650 Kittiwakes, 475 Manx Shearwaters, 400 Fulmars, 300 Gannets and 50 Sooty Shearwaters per hour at different dates in the autumn. There were also a certain number of rarities such as a Cory's and a Little Shearwater, Surf Scoters, Sabine's and Ross's Gulls, which were accepted at the time by the *British Birds* rarities committee and listed in its annual reports. There were also three other birds about which I was less certain which may be worth placing on record.

On 6 June 1976 in the course of a four-hour seawatch during which 2,000 birds passed with a force 5 southwest wind and 6/8 cloud cover I noticed a large bird passing north about 300-400 yards offshore at 0845 hours. It was brownish-grey with a large, heavy, light-coloured bill, a short round tail, and a slow wing-beat interspersed with glides on drooping, bowed wings. It was much larger than nearby Gannets, and while I could not identify it at the time I took field notes, see below. I subsequently recognised it from a photograph as a giant petrel *Macronectes* sp. This petrel has been recorded once since in the North Atlantic off northwest France in November 1967.

#### COPY OF FIELD NOTES

Time 8.45 am

Bill very large and pale  
in colour

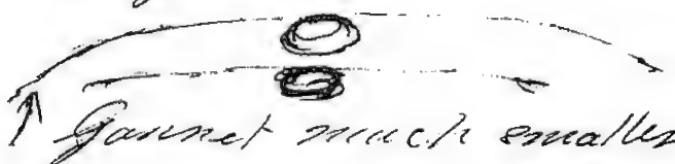
Wings long and  
bowed



Tail short  
and round

over all colour brownish  
grey

glided on bowed drooping  
wings



Gannet much smaller

On 17 July 1977 I saw a large skua which was unusually pale on the head and underparts with much darker wings, tail and upperparts. No particular attention was paid to it at the time since it was thought that only one species of great skua *Catharacta skua* was likely to occur. In view of the recent discovery on spring passage in the western North Atlantic of a growing number of South Polar Skuas *C. maccormicki* which are polymorphic with a pale phase of this type (P. Devillers, *Auk* 94:417-429, 1977) such birds clearly deserve more attention in future.

On 16 October 1977 when there was a force 4 southeast wind and 4/8 cloud with dense fog half a mile out to sea I saw a large tern pass south about 200 yards out to sea at 1015 hrs. It was almost upon me before I noticed it when it appeared about the same size as a Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne tschegreva* with which I was already familiar but had a deep fork to the tail which I could not see the dark shading under the primaries found in that species. The dark cap ran round the crown leaving the forehead white, and the bill appeared large and dark. It seems most likely to have been a Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*.

K. Verrall, 1 Village Lodge, Weston-under-Lizard, Shifnal, Shropshire.

#### GIANT PETRELS, PALE GREAT SKUAS, AND KUMLIEN'S GULLS IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

**Giant Petrels:** Bernard King told me about his preceding report of a giant petrel *Macronectes* sp. at the time, when the matter was taken no further because there seemed too much conflict over the evidence for a new North Atlantic record. When I subsequently encountered the second description while reading through Keith Verrall's notes it seemed desirable to review the matter, and we consulted the observers. Bernard King reported that he had become even more convinced since it had transpired that another giant petrel had been recorded immediately to the south off Brittany two weeks later. Keith Verrall also reported that while he had not recorded his observation at the time because he was unable to identify the bird, he had since done so from photographs, but after such delay thought it unlikely that the records would be accepted. Since the editor would not accept any mention of such observations in an account of seabirds seen from Islay that we were preparing for *Scottish Birds* (12(1):3-11) until they had been accepted by the *British Birds* rarities committee, I therefore advised him to submit it, whereupon it was duly rejected and we have decided to place it on record here along with Mr King's report.

It is tempting to think that together with the Black-browed Albatrosses *Diomedea melanophris* reported repeatedly in the later 1960's these records all refer to the same bird, yet in both cases

there are discrepancies. In particular, the records of giant petrels occur in the wrong sequence. Thus while the report of a bird seen off Brittany by P. Meeth states that it had "the head and sides of the neck whitish, showing some dark spots on the nape and ear coverts", which indicates that it must have been an adult Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, Bernard King's report describes his bird as "medium brown except for a pale front to the head . . ." which implies that it was either immature or an example of the equally probable or improbable Northern Giant Petrel *M. halli*. Keith Verrall's subsequent description of his bird as "brownish grey" suggests that it might have been an immature of either species, although all these differences might be due to the viewing conditions.

**South Polar Skuas:** Until Pierre Devillers discovered an old specimen of the South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki* from Greenland (*Auk* 94:417-429, 1977) it was not realised that it is necessary to scrutinise any large skuas seen in the North Atlantic carefully. Since then this form has been found on spring passage with Great Skuas *C. skua* along the east coast of North America on a number of occasions, notably by R. R. Veit (*American Birds* 32:300-302, 1978), who photographed several off New England. It is slightly smaller than the Great Skua with a thinner bill, and like the small skuas occurs in two colour-phases, one with a light head and underparts but dark upperparts which is "practically unmistakable" and the other uniformly dark, which is another matter. In examining my back notes I noticed that I had seen an unusually pale bird at 49°10'N 6°10'W off Brittany among about 40 large skuas encountered during a cruise across the mouth of the English Channel at the height of the autumn migration on 26 September 1973. When I commented on this Keith Verrall remembered that he had seen a similar bird, reported in the preceding note, off Islay in July 1977. While these records are by no means conclusive, they suggest that South Polar Skuas may also be occurring unrecognised on the east side of the North Atlantic as well.

**"Kumlien's Gull":** The large gulls regularly show some variation in the amount of pigment at the wing-tip in the adult. In north-west Europe this has frequently led to confusion between pale Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and the white-winged Glaucous and Iceland Gulls *L. hyperboreus* and *L. glaucopterus*, which are more reliably distinguished by their heavier and lighter build respectively, or hybrids between Herring and Glaucous Gulls. Following the occurrence of several cases I appealed for records in *British Birds* (65:265, 1972), at which point it became clear that they are not uncommon, although it may be worth listing additional cases.

In addition to numerous records published elsewhere they included at least four birds which differed from Herring Gulls only in a reduction in the black at the wing-tip, including one or two seen at Belvide and Cannock Reservoirs. Staffs. bv David

Smallshire early in 1972, one seen at Rhiconich, Sutherland, by Tony Parsons on 20 June 1972, one seen regularly on Aberdeen Breakwater by Paul Mills early in 1973, and one seen several times on Hove Lagoon, Sussex by Gerald Sutton early in 1974. There was one report of an unusually large, pale bird with barely visible black at the wing-tips seen at the Pool of Virkie, Shetland by Mike Carins on 16 January 1966 which seems likely to have been a Herring x Glaucous hybrid, and one of a bird which resembled a nearby second-year Iceland Gull except for the presence of grey ovals near the wingtips seen on Tralee rubbish tip, Kerry, by Frank King on 10 January 1958, which seems likely to have been the eastern North American race *L. g. kumlienii*. This has since been recorded again in the *Irish Bird Report* for 1971 and could cause confusion. It may deserve further comment.

While the Iceland Gulls breeding in Greenland which normally occur in Europe usually have white wing-tips, the form *L. g. kumlienii* occurring around Baffin Island and migrating down the east coast of North America usually has a small, grey mark there. This becomes black in the birds breeding further west in Arctic Canada and wintering down the west coast of North America, sometimes referred to a separate species Thayer's Gull *L. thayeri*, although they apparently interbreed with Icelandic Gulls (B. Knudsen, *Pacific Seabird Group Bull.* 3 (1):27, 1976). They are all smaller and more graceful than Herring Gulls, with round heads, slighter bills, and dark eyes, and the young birds have pale bases to the bill and primaries. It is possibly fortunate that the western populations with dark wing-tips are unlikely to be seen often in Europe.

### ROSS'S GULL IN THE NORTHEASTERN ATLANTIC OCEAN

By Michael H. Thurston

Although the existence of Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* has been known for over 150 years, it is still something of a mystery bird. The species may be regarded as a 'naval bird', as it is named for Sir James Clark Ross who obtained the first specimens in 1823 during Sir William Parry's second attempt to find the North West Passage.

In breeding dress the species is unmistakable with its rosy plumage and narrow dark neck band, but during the winter it is much less conspicuous (Grant, 1981). Blomqvist and Elander (1981) have summarised available data on the biology and distribution. The main breeding grounds lie in northeastern Siberia. Somewhat surprisingly, the usual breeding habitat is taiga and fertile wet tundra dominated by dwarf willows and sedges (Buturlin, 1906; Cartier and Cooke, 1980). In recent years nesting



Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* - adult in winter plumage

Photo: Michael Densley

has been recorded in Greenland, Svalbard and Canada, showing that Ross's Gull is also capable of breeding on high Arctic tundra (see references in Blomqvist and Elander, 1981). It is possible, though not proven, that birds winter in the Arctic pack-ice (Densley, 1977). They may be abundant in this habitat during the summer months (Meltofte *et. al.*, 1981). The association with the pack-ice is a close one, as the species is rare in lower latitudes. Densley (1977) has documented sightings made in Scandinavia, continental Europe and the British Isles. There are ten records from the former two areas, while from the British Isles there are two early records and eighteen between 1960 and 1976. An additional five records have been accepted subsequently (Rogers, 1981). Some of this increase may be due to more observers of greater ability, but Sharrock and Sharrock (1976) and Densley (1977) accept that there has been a genuine increase in vagrancy.

The vast majority of observations of Ross's Gull outside its normal Arctic habitat have been made from land, so it is of interest to record a sighting made at sea.

R.R.S. *Discovery* Cruise 30, leg 1, took place during April-May 1971 and involved biological investigations between Scotland and Iceland. On 30 April, during a routine bird observation, a gull distinguishable by its smaller size was noted among a flock of Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* and Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*. As the birds approached the vessel, the lack of pattern on the mantle, the wedge-shaped tail, and a strong pink flush on the underparts identified the smallest individual as an adult Ross's Gull in breeding plumage. During the following five or six minutes, the

bird came to within twenty metres of the ship. Additional characters noted included the pale grey mantle, short blackish bill, narrow dark neck ring and blood red feet. The flight was more delicate and buoyant than that of the other species present, and was reminiscent of a tern in the precise wing movements and the tendency to jink from side to side. No attempts at feeding or settling on the water were observed. At the time of the observation (0650 GMT), the ship was at lat. 60°08'N, long. 19°39'W and steaming at 2 knots with a trawl in the water. Visibility was greater than 15 kilometres, but with occasional mist patches, the wind westerly at 12 knots, waves and swell low, air temperature 8.2°C, and water temperature 8.8°C.

Plumage characters not noted at the time, but which should be looked for, are the white tail, and the dark underwing with a conspicuous white trailing edge. Juvenile and adult winter plumages have been analysed by Grant (1981), but the small black bill and wedge-shaped tail serve to distinguish the species.

Of the 23 British records, six are from Shetland and eleven from northeastern England. This pattern suggests that birds seen in Britain may come from the area north and northeast of Svalbard, where large numbers of Ross's Gull spend the summer and possibly the winter months (Densley, 1977; Meltofte *et al.*, 1981). The *Discovery* sighting in company with Black-headed Gulls is of interest in that the latter are not common in the middle of the North Atlantic but the Iceland ones are to some extent migrants (Bourne, *pers. comm.*). This suggests that the proximal origin of the *Discovery* Ross's Gull may not have been the British Isles, but Iceland. Ross's Gull has been recorded from Iceland on seven occasions (Densley, 1977).

I am most grateful to Michael Densley for allowing me to use his photograph of the adult Ross's Gull in winter plumage, taken at Scarborough, Yorkshire in March 1976.

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## THE ANCIENT MARINER'S ALBATROSS

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

Problems with bird identification are not new, and occur in the most eminent places. For example, two thousand years ago the Roman satirist Juvenal quoted "rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno"—one of the world's rare birds which is black and rather like a swan—as an example of the improbable, before it was realised that swans are normally this colour in Australia. Similarly last year R. G. B. Brown identified the albatross described by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in 1798, thought in the past to be based upon an account of the slaughter of a "disconsolate black albitross" off Cape Horn in 1719 pointed out to Coleridge by William Wordsworth, as a giant petrel. This deserves more scrutiny.

According to Alfred Newton's Dictionary of Birds of 1896 the name "albatross" has a long history during which it has been applied to a variety of birds. It derives from the Greek for a bucket, kados, which was also applied to pelicans because of their distensible gular pouches. It was Arabised to al-kadous, adopted by the Iberians for a variety of large seabirds as alcatraz (hence the application of the name to a rock where they used to perch off San Francisco later used for other purposes), and eventually applied by the British to the greatest of all seabirds known variously as the alcatrass or algatross.

For a long time the precise identity of this bird remained obscure, until in 1745 George Edwards described and figured a specimen in the Tower of London in his *Natural History of Birds* under the name albatross, finally fixing its spelling and identity. It was then given the scientific name *Diomedea exulans* by Linnaeus, using a vernacular name for the shearwaters which frequent the grave of Diomedes who took part in the siege of Troy, which provides a further demonstration of how long some bird names have been in use and how they have been switched around (I. Winthrope, *Seabird Report* 3:37-40).

Modern albatrosses first appear to have been studies at sea by the naturalists who accompanied Cook, and especially by J. R. Forster during the second voyage of 1772-75 to explore the Southern Ocean. Bernard Smith showed in 1956 that one of his companions, the astronomer and meteorologist William Wales, whose journal in the Mitchell Library in Sydney mentions the collection of the albatrosses, subsequently taught Coleridge at Christ's Hospital in London, and may have interested him in great voyages. Coleridge then read the entire nautical library of the mathematics school which trained navigators for the navy to collect material for a poem about the subject (*J. Warburg Courtauld Insts.* 19:117-154).

It seems quite possible that Coleridge could have met Forster and heard about his observations on albatrosses, which eventually

appeared in a foreign mathematical journal most likely to have been suggested by Wales (*Mem. Math. Phys. Acad. Sci*) 10:563-572). In any case Coleridge must have encountered the report and many other references to albatrosses in working through the library. Thus it seems unlikely that he needed much advice on the subject from Wordsworth when they met ten years later, and really consulted him about the form of his poem, with the result that after he was dead Wordsworth received credit for the wrong reasons.

We still regularly receive reports about strange birds from romantic poets, and that cited by Wordsworth could apply to almost anything from a young Wandering Albatross to a Great Skua or Black Swan. It seems most likely that Coleridge merely seized upon a famous name and then deduced that the bird had habits such as soaring overhead to settle on the mast from observations of gulls. This would also explain why he thought that it was of a suitable size to hang around a man's neck. Has anyone else recently noticed an albatross sitting on a mast? According to most reports if they ever land on a vessel they become sea-sick.

## ROUND THE WORLD IN 90 DAYS

AN ACCOUNT OF BIRDS SEEN DURING S.S. CANBERRA'S  
WORLD CRUISE  
FROM 12 JANUARY - 12 APRIL 1980

By Bernard and Elizabeth Watts

PART II\*

Sydney - Guam - Yokohama - Hong-Kong - Singapore - Madras - Colombo - Mombasa - Suez Canal - Haifa - Palma - Southampton

S.S. *Canberra* sailed from Sydney at sundown on 20 February 1980. What a visit it had been for us! Within thirty miles of Sydney we had observed and identified some 106 species of land birds in 9 hours, mostly due to the enthusiasm and skill of a young Australian naturalist, Trevor Ouested. He was a member of the Cumberland Bird Club, the President of which is our RNBWS representative in Australia, Arnold McGill.

The journey up the Australian coast was not very exciting apart from sighting a dozen or so Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*.

Then came a 3-day period of "No birds sighted" followed by 2 days when we saw only 4 frigate-birds and 3 Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster*. A tropical storm all but prevented our visiting Guam but at noon on the 26 February 1980 the weather cleared sufficiently for us to tie up in a birdless anchorage.

The journey from Guam to Japan was also disappointing with only a handful of sightings; Sooty Terns *Sterna fuscata*, Brown and

\*For Part I see *Sea Swallow* 30, pp. 9-11.

Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula*, and a few terns being the only rewards of many hours' watching.

Yokohama was our next port, with its ever present smog, and a hazy glimpse of Mount Fuji some 70 miles distant. Here Japanese Gulls *Larus crassirostris* and the slightly larger Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* afforded us good views from the deck, together with a few Slaty-backed Gulls *L. schistisagus* and just one Northern Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus* to make us feel at home. A Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* was our only other seabird sighting in a country where we also found the land birds apparently scarce.

We had hoped to see good numbers of birds as we sailed down to Hong Kong but apart from 3 White Wagtails *Motacilla alba lugens* which have more white on the wing than *M. a. alba*, the journey was unrewarding. We reached Hong Kong on the 6 March and the skyline which hitherto we had known only from photographs was all but obliterated by driving rain and thick mist.

\*For Part I see *Sea Swallow* 30, pp. 9-11.

Preparation for our 3-day visit again proved invaluable and a member of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society was at hand to guide us to the Mai Po Marsh area where we sighted some 54 species in 4 hours of delightful birding. Highlights for us were 3 Chinese Black-headed Gulls *Larus saundersi*, winter visitors to the area, 4 Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus*, a huge roost of some 100 Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea*, Great Egrets *Egretta alba*, Purple Heron *A. purpurea* and Little Egrets *E. garzetta* plus a fine selection of waders and duck. This was another day's birding we shall never forget.

Apart from three 'possible' Lesser Crested Terns *Thalasseus bengalensis* fishing in Singapore Harbour the 3-day journey to this ever busy port produced no sightings at all and so we were delighted to visit the Jurong Bird Park on the outskirts of the city. Here many species flourish in almost natural surroundings, the highlight of which is a fantastic aviary with, it is claimed, the world's highest man-made waterfall.

Continuing towards India; surely we would see some birds? It was not to be, and our log records an amazing "4 days at sea—no birds". Then, on the fifth day in the Bay of Bengal we sighted a Red-billed Tropic-bird *Phaethon aethereus* as we neared Madras.

The sun erupted as a burnished ball of fire colouring the steel grey waters of our wake as we slowly made our way into Madras Harbour, the most incredible port we were to visit. Overhead 20 Indian Black-headed Gulls *Larus brunnicephalus* provided an escort and in the distance two or three Great Black-headed Gulls *Larus ichthyaetus* were making good use of what little breeze there was to soar effortlessly above the water. A small party of Eastern Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* were resting on buoys, their plumage much darker than our own Common Tern.

After a full day ashore we returned to S.S. *Canberra* and counted at least 20 Black Kites *Milvus migrans* over the city as the sky quickly darkened.

At sea again on the 18 March we had yet another birdless day! We report this again so that fellow watchers who, like ourselves, may not have experienced these waters at this season, can be warned not to be too optimistic.

We anchored off Colombo on the 19 March where Gull-billed *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Whiskered *Chlidonias hybrida* and Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii* fished around the ship. Whilst we saw a fair number of species during drives around the Sri Lankan countryside the harbour was unrewarding apart from the three species of tern and a few Indian Black-headed Gulls.

The journey from Sri Lanka to Mombasa took five days and during this period we saw no birds at all with one exception—on the 22 March after a violent storm the horizon seemed alive with birds. Whilst distance made identification impossible the best guess had to be Sooty Terns, there being vast nesting colonies on the islands in the vicinity. We found all the seabirds a great delight but none more so attractive than the Aden Gulls *L. hemprichi* which greeted us in Mombasa Harbour. Joined by a single Whiskered Tern and a Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* they made an impressive sight as they scavenged around the ship. Later we saw some immature Grey-headed Gulls *L. cirrocephalus* and a lone White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*.

Our mini safari to Tsavo National Park rewarded us with 106 species of birds and 21 mammals before we rejoined the ship two days later to sail north via the Suez Canal.

This leg of the voyage was to be, we hoped, the most important as we were to be in the Red Sea and Canal on the 31 March and 1 April, considered a peak migration period. Our great disappointment is hard to convey for, apart from a few gulls and terns, 8 Brown Boobies and 1 Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*, our only sightings of migratory species were 1 White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*; a few Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* and Turtle Doves *S. turtur*; 1 Yellow Wagtail *M. flava*; 15 Pintail *Anas acuta*, and some Little Egrets, Spur-winged Plovers *Vanellus spinosus* and Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, the latter three species possibly being residents anyway.

Of the many gulls it is interesting to read from our notes that only one Red Sea Black-headed Gull *L. leucophthalmus* and 2 or 3 Mediterranean Gulls *L. melanocephalus* were positively identified.

The passage from Egypt to Israel gave us 2 possible Levant Sparrow-hawks *Accipiter brevipes* well out to sea and difficult to identify in overcast conditions.

At Haifa the weather improved but whilst Easter in the Holy Land was a long-hoped-for experience, we did not add very many birds to our list before embarking for Majorca where Europe's cold spring of 1980 precluded any rewarding birdwatching either on land or at sea. Having made several previous journeys through the

Mediterranean we were surprised to record only about 27 Cory's Shearwater *Puffinus kuhli* and 3-4 Balearic Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* together with about 10 yellow-legged Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* between Haifa and Palma.

The final stage of our journey took us from Palma to Southampton and again S.S. *Canberra* acted host to far fewer birds than we had hoped, the sum total being 1 Turtle Dove and 1 female Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*.

We noted 1 Swallow *Hirundo rustica* flying north; up to 40 Cory's Shearwaters; 10+ Gannets *Sula bassana*, 1 Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* and a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls before docking at our home port after 91 really fascinating days on board a most comfortable and stable ship.

Many birdwatchers have asked us, 'How many species did you see?', and the answer has to be somewhat vague. Even now with the aid of our detailed notes, we are still unable to name some of the species seen in Bonaire and the Panama Canal. At the last count we claimed 475 positively identified species in 91 days.

Numbers really mean very little to us; it was the joy of seeing some of the world's most beautiful birds in their natural setting that we remember.

We will always be indebted to the RNBWS, and to Captain Gerald Tuck in particular, whose *Field Guide to the Sea Birds of Britain and the World* is a must for anyone undertaking a sea voyage.

## SHORT NOTES

### THE COLOUR OF THE TAIL COVERTS OF THE BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne



A Black-footed Albatross *Diomedea nigripes*  
showing white at base of the tail, a sign of maturity

Photo: S. J. Hingston

There is some confusion in the literature about the significance of the white present at the base of the tail in some Black-footed Albatrosses *Diomedea nigripes*, and this point was raised by Mrs C. Roberts after a visit to Hawaii. We have asked Dr Craig Harrison to check up on this. After consulting with Maura Naughton, who has worked for three years at the breeding colony on Laysan, he reports that in young birds the base of the tail is normally dark but that in 16 of 17 old birds feeding chicks it was white, and in the other "off colour". It appears that white at the base of the tail is a sign of maturity, and it would be useful to record whether this character is present in birds seen at sea.

### THE FURTHER INCREASE AND SPREAD OF THE SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

Hiroshi Hasegawa reports that in March 1979 he saw at least 95 Short-tailed Albatrosses *Diomedea albatrus* at the main surviving colony on Torishima ( $30^{\circ}29'N$   $140^{\circ}19'E$ ) south-east of Japan and was able to ring 22 chicks. At the same time a photograph taken from a helicopter showed 13 old and three younger adults and possibly two chicks (seen less well) on Minamikojima in the Senkaku-Retto north-east of Taiwan ( $25^{\circ}45'N$

123°36'E), where there was known to be a colony in the past. Yozo Tsukamoto reports that there were 130 adults and about 50 nests and 20 chicks on Torishima the following year (Pacific Seabird Group Bulletin 6(1):23-25, 7(2):79). Craig Harrison reports that in the Hawaiian Leeward Islands an adult ringed on Torishima 16-17 years ago is now visiting Midway annually, where there was also an immature last year with another adult carrying different rings on Tern Island, French Frigate Shoals. It is good news that this species, which was thought to be extinct after the war, is becoming re-established so widely.

#### SPOTTED CRAKE IN THE EASTERN ATLANTIC

In a letter to the Editor, Dr M. N. Rankin (Surgeon-Lt. R.N.V.R. and member of R.N.B.W.S. since 1946) writes:

"... Noting your comment in *Sea Swallow* 30, page 12 about a Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* observed by C.P.O. T. H. Hunter, you may be interested to hear of an old record I have, which was never published, of one coming on board ship in the eastern Atlantic on 6 March 1945. There was no *Sea Swallow* at that time. I was on the rescue ship *Rathlin* travelling in a convoy proceeding in a southwesterly direction. The weather was fair and our position 50°28'N 15°04'W. I had been watching a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* which had just departed for another ship when I was told of a bird on the boat deck. This was easily caught, examined, and details recorded. After being ringed it was released and flew away strongly. The position was some 190 miles southwest of Ireland, and the date seemed to me an early one for migration."

#### LANDBIRDS SEEN FROM SHIPS IN THE NORTH SEA — 1980/81

By Mark L. Tasker

The prime role of the Seabirds at Sea Team is the systematic recording of seabirds in the North Sea. However, the team also recorded landbirds seen, as these often added spice to the routine of recording literally thousands of Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis*. Shipboard landbird records are reported to the R.N.B.W.S., while those from oil platforms are sent to the North Sea Bird Club - an organisation developed through eight sponsoring oil companies for people working offshore. The following is a brief summary of our observations during 1980 and 1981.

A total of 65 landbird species identified from ships and several more seen from platforms indicates the high diversity of species offshore. Almost all birds recorded are migrants in some sense, though a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* off the Belgian coast is an unexpected record. The commonest species seen was the Knot *Calidris canutus* with five occurrences totalling 62 birds. The species most frequently encountered was the Starling *Sturnus*

*vulgaris* with 22 occurrences totalling 59 birds. Twenty-two species have been seen once only; amongst these were Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* and Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*.

The majority of birds occur during the peak migration periods in spring and autumn, with a few in mid-summer and winter. In spring the first birds noticeable in any numbers at sea are Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*. These start being common in March. April brings the southern wintering migrants such as Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, as well as waders moving back from the Continent with the main passage in late August-September. The southern wintering birds then become more in evidence again in September, while October sees the large scale movements of thrushes and smaller birds from the Continent, bound for a winter in the British Isles.

During the last two years our experience has shown that landbirds can be seen not infrequently from ships in the North Sea. It will be many years however before enough data is collected to allow a comprehensive analysis of their occurrence and movements.

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#### DUNLIN, YELLOW WAGTAIL AND MEADOW PIPIT FEEDING ON SHRIMPS ONBOARD SHIP IN THE NORTH SEA

By S. J. Hingston, 2nd Engineer Officer, M.N.

The following observations were made at the Leman Gas Field in the southern North Sea (position: 53°03'N 2°14'E) whilst on board the diving support vessel *British Enterprise Two*. A diving team was working from the vessel to clear marine growth from the underwater structure of the gas production platforms. During good weather on 30 August 1981 an immature Dunlin *Calidris alpina* was discovered on the poop deck. I observed the bird as it scurried around pecking at hundreds of small shrimps up to 9 mm long which lay scattered over the deck. The poop deck was used as a diving platform and the divers emerged from their cleaning operation with suits and equipment crawling with hundreds of the tiny creatures. The deck was usually hosed down after each dive but many of the shrimps were left stranded and it was on these that the Dunlin was feeding. Although it was wary, it was possible to approach to within 3 or 4 metres provided this was done slowly and without sudden movements.

At 1600 it was slack water and diving operations resumed with all the normal activity on the poop deck. The Dunlin perched on the main deck overlooking the poop and seemed to find interest in all these goings on. As the divers emerged from the water the bird

became quite agitated and excited calling several times, and as soon as the last diver had been hosed down it flew down to feed regardless of the activity that was still going on. By late afternoon the next day the bird seemed to have lost much of its instinctive fear of humans, and was seen on numerous occasions scurrying around between legs in its haste to feed as the shrimps fell on to the deck from the divers' suits. In view of the excellent sunny weather I had not expected to find the bird still on board.

That night it slept in a sheltered corner of the poop. Throughout the following day from early morning the performance was repeated, and after dark it continued to feed under the glare of the floodlights immediately after a late dive. On the fourth day the Dunlin was joined by an immature Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* which also fed on the shrimps alongside the Dunlin. The wagtail was very wary, and after being disturbed several times it flew away to the platform where I watched it feeding at low water amongst the seaweed on the platform leg braces.

Early next morning the vessel left the Leman Field and docked at Great Yarmouth and not until it was alongside did the Dunlin leave.

In October 1981 on several occasions I saw migrating Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* also feeding on the shrimps. The food taken by Dunlins recorded in the *Handbook of British Birds*, Witherby *et al.* 1943, includes shrimps but neither the Yellow Wagtail nor the Meadow Pipit are specifically recorded as feeding on them, although one wagtail killed on the coast had eaten sand-hoppers. These examples suggest that exhausted passersine which are forced to land on board by adverse weather are starving to the extent that they will eat anything insect-like in order to survive and build up energy reserves to allow them to continue to their destinations.

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## THE SEABIRD GROUPS AND THEIR PUBLICATIONS

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society which was founded in 1946 is apparently the senior organisation in the world dealing with seabirds. It has subsequently been supplemented by a number of regional and national organisations whose activities have been co-ordinated since 1966 by a committee which organises a regular meeting at the four-yearly International Ornithological Congresses, publishing a report in the *Proceedings*, and more recently a Working Group of the International Council for Bird Preservation, which is due to hold its first international meeting at Cambridge in August 1982, and will also be publishing *Proceedings*. The most important regional bodies are as follows:



**The Seabird Group** — founded with the support of the British national ornithological societies in 1966. It initiated a number of successful enquiries into the occurrence of seabirds at their colonies, at sea, and dead on beaches which have now mainly been taken over on a permanent basis by other organisations, although it still gives research grants. It originally published a mimeographed *Seabird Bulletin* containing original contributions, replaced in 1969 by a newsletter two or three times a year and an irregular printed *Seabird Report*, of which there have now been six. Secretary: Dr T. R. Birkhead, Department of Zoology, The University, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK; subscription £5.



**The Pacific Seabird Group** — set up in western North America to deal with the North Pacific in 1971. It publishes a mimeographed *Bulletin* twice a year, important for many abstracts of accounts of new research given at its annual conferences since 1974. Permanent address: c/o Point Reyes Bird Observatory, 4990 Shoreline Highway, Stinson Beach, CA 94970. USA; subscription \$10.



**The Australasian Seabird Group** — set up by the Field Investigation Committee of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union in 1971. It publishes (twice yearly) a mimeographed *Bulletin* containing some original material. Addresses: PO Box 65, Civic Square, Canberra, ACT 2608, Australia, and PO Box 12397, Wellington, New Zealand, with regional representatives; subscription \$3.



**The African Seabird Group** — set up in 1976 and publishes an excellent mimeographed journal, *Cormorant*, twice a year, which contains many important new contributions. Address: Percy Fitzpatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa; subscription R5.

**The Colonial Waterbird Group** — also set up in 1976 in eastern North America to cover a wider variety of species, including waders in all senses of that term (shorebirds in Europe, herons and their allies in North America). Its newsletter is not very informative and its original contributions have been published separately as *Proceedings* of its 1978 and 1979 conferences (\$10 each) followed by a printed journal, *Colonial Waterbirds* (\$20 each). The subscription is also \$20, so it is liable to cost as much as all the other activities put together. Treasurer: Iolo Price, 563 Fairview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 0X4, Canada.

## BOOK REVIEWS

By Dr W. R. P. Bourne

### A CATALOGUE OF VANISHING BIRDS

King, W. B. 1981. *Endangered birds of the world: the ICPB Red Data Book.* Pp 600+. Smithsonian Press and International Council for Bird Preservation, Washington DC, ISBN 0-87474-583-7.

One of the incidental risks for a threatened species is that its plight may be overlooked until it is too late to save it. In consequence the ICBP commissioned Col. Jack Vincent to prepare a series of loose-leaf summaries of information about threatened taxa in 1966, which were replaced as it became necessary, revised by Warren King in 1978-9, and have now been reprinted as a massive mimeographed handbook. It includes some 62 pages of introduction listing bird families, 435 threatened forms classified in systematic and geographical categories, 164 which are thought to have been exterminated since 1600, 4 considered out of danger, and 91 removed from the list for various other reasons since the previous edition. The species accounts deal with status, distribution, population, habitat, conservation measures taken and proposed, remarks, and references. The whole is coded in a most complicated manner, for no very good reason, although the pages are not numbered and there is no index.

Four seabirds are considered to have become extinct since 1600, the Great Auk *Alca impennis*, Steller's Cormorant *Phalacrocorax perspicillatus*, Guadalupe Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma macrodactyla*, and Jamaica Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata caribbaea*, while some others such as the St. Helena Petrel *Pterodroma rupinarum* may have been overlooked. Another 29 are considered to be threatened, but their situation varied greatly, from species which are still numerous but declining such as the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*, to one which is only known from a single specimen collected over a century ago, the Fiji Petrel *Pterodroma macgillivrayi*. The majority are birds with a limited distribution occurring in reduced numbers. The serious cases include the Short-tailed Albatross *Diomedea albatrus*, now numbering about a hundred pairs breeding at two colonies in the north-west Pacific, and the Bermuda, Magenta and Chatham Petrels *Pterodroma cahow*, *P. magentae* and *P. axillaris*, which cannot number many dozen between them. The importance of the last case among others, a highly distinct form of great interest, is masked by the adoption of an obsolete classification which treats it as a race of another species, and the information is often rather out of date.

In many cases the predicament of these birds is only one aspect of an overwhelming threat to all insular wildlife from development and introduced predators which also affects a host of landbirds. The outlook for many of them is not as black as it has been

painted, although that of some, such as the Cape Verde Petrel *Pterodroma (mollis) feae*, dismissed in a footnote under an allied form, although it should possibly also be regarded as a distinct species, is worse. In a number of cases there is still a need for more information, for example with the Fiji Petrel, Beck's Petrel *Pterodroma (rostrata) becki* in the Solomons, and especially the Chinese Crested Tern, still referred to as *Sterna zimmermanni* although it is reported in a footnote that the correct name is *S. bernsteini*. Apparently little has been heard of this species recently because it nested in the area of military activity along the coast of China facing Taiwan, migrating southward in the winter towards the East Indies, and any RNBWS members passing by would perform a useful service if they look out for it.

Indeed, anyone likely to visit remote places would do well to acquire this useful book and consider whether he could do anything to investigate and help any threatened birds he may encounter, reporting the results to the ICBP.

#### ALMOST ALL ABOUT THE BIRDS OF BRITISH ESTUARIES

Prater, A. J. 1981 *Estuary birds of Britain and Ireland*. Pp 440, 16 plates, 87 figures, 110 tables. T. and A. D. Poyser, Calton, £14.

This is the report of a massive enquiry carried out by a committee representing the British natural history organisations, with financial support from the Nature Conservancy Council, between 1969-75. It basically involved mapping the habitats in the main estuaries and then carrying out systematic simultaneous counts of their birds. A great variety of ancillary information was also collected as well, indicated by the main chapter headings:— the nature of an estuary; patterns of shorebird feeding; migration and distribution in western Europe; barrages, reservoirs and other threats; the counts; regional analysis of the estuaries; accounts of species; and appendices giving highest average monthly counts for the main species in each estuary and criteria used for assessing their international and British importance.

In general it is an astonishingly thorough job liable to render the severest critic speechless, and the pleasant and talented organiser and author deserves unbounded congratulations. From our own narrow point of view I am rather sad that seabirds have not been covered as well as the waders and wildfowl. The gulls follow different routines so that they did not fit well into the investigations, while nobody has yet found a really satisfactory way of investigating the small, rather threatened group of birds such as terns, sea-duck, divers and grebes which feed just offshore. Some of the threats to estuaries, notably pollution, are not covered as well as the rest, either, which is rather a pity when there was a good deal more information available. But these are marginal quibbles for a work which covers its main objectives excellently.

## FURTHER LIGHT ON OMAN

Journal of Oman Studies Special Reports: 1, 1977, Scientific results of the Oman Flora and Fauna Survey 1975; 2, 1980, The Oman Fauna and Flora Survey 1977 (Dhofar). Office of the Government Adviser for Conservation of the Environment, Sultanate of Oman.

Last year we noticed the appearance of a remarkably fine ornithological textbook in Oman. This was based in part on some major surveys of the natural history of this country, which is of outstanding interest as it lies at the junction of three major zoogeographical regions, the Palaearctic, Ethiopia and Orient, but had seldom been visited until recently. The results of two important expeditions to investigate the mountainous regions in the north-east and south-west are summarised in these two special reports, produced in much the same format as the bird-book, and containing a series of first-class scientific contributions by major experts from different disciplines. The birds are covered in the first case by M. D. Gallagher (1:27-58), and the second by M. D. Gallagher and T. D. Rogers (2:347-385), including general surveys of the area concerned and detailed notes on species. Both form very distinguished contributions, which should receive the careful attention of anyone seriously interested in the natural history of the Middle East.

## AMERICAN SEABIRD SYMPOSIA

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It is fairly astounding for those of us accustomed to regard marine ornithology as a struggling minor subject to see a growing flood of seabird literature. Where in the past we occasionally encountered single papers, they now come in bundles either commemorating international parties, or specially commissioned by publishers. The first of these collections contains 23 out of 42 contributions to a meeting to discuss the impact of offshore oil developments in Alaska, several of lasting interest. The second contains the ten main papers given at the centenary celebrations of

the second oldest existing American ornithological society. The third is a specially commissioned publication containing eleven massive reviews of different aspects of seabird biology, mainly involving behaviour, often at the nest. The overall impact is rather heavy, both on account of the number of contributions in the first case and their length in the last, but between them they cover most aspects of seabird biology visible from North America, and a prodigious number of references. Just the thing if you are laid up for several months with a broken leg or have to travel to one of the more distant planets.

## BIRDS OF BOUGAINEVILLE

Hadden, Don, 1981. Birds of the North Solomons. Pp. xi + 109, 24 colour plates. Wau Ecology Institute, Box 77, Wau, Papua New Guinea, K 6, US \$ 9.50.

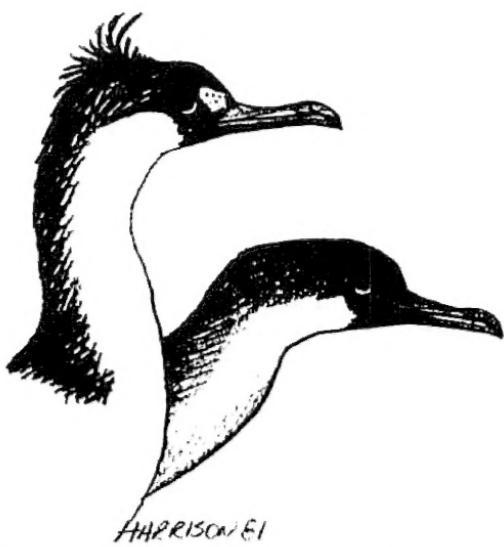
Bougainville and its less-known northern outlier Buka are famous for a World War II battle and the subsequent development of a vast copper mine. It appears that they still also have a fine array of tropical birds, described and photographed in loving detail in this field guide with many original observations, including Heinroth's Shearwater *Puffinus heinrothi* which had not been recorded for over 50 years, and a new species of thicket warbler. The information on other seabirds is clearly still very incomplete, leaving an important opening for any mariners passing that way, but Black-headed Gulls *Laris ridibundus* are also reported to occur as winter visitors and a variety of terns. (Tony Skyme has also recently reported 100 pairs of Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* and 50 pairs of Black-naped Terns *Sterna sumatrana* nesting on Mowensand Island offshore on 24 March 1981 in *RAF Ornithological Society Newsletter* 36.)

## TAIL PIECE

By John Mullen

In 1930 I was an AB aboard H.M.S. *Daffodil*, a coal-burning sloop, on the west coast of Africa station—though we were a long way off station when the happening happened. We were en route from Tristan da Cunha to Simonstown and had run into a hell of a storm. I had the middle watch, starboard boats crew. The storm up above seemed to be much worse than at sea-level. I noticed an albatross battling against the winds—none of your naturalists' view of a monarch of the skies soaring along on the wind. This bird was really fighting for survival, but he didn't make it. He crashed against our main-mast and fell to the deck. Amazing as it seems, no one saw it happen except me. I ran to where the bird had fallen and I was astounded at its size; it looked like a big seagull in the sky and here on deck it looked like an ostrich. I did intend heaving it over the side but I thought I'd play a joke on the lads. So I carried it forward to the well-deck. The seamen's heads were on the port side of the well-deck. I took my bird inside the heads and strung it up on the bulkhead with wings outstretched. They were about seven feet across. Then I sneaked away and left it to its fate. My idea was to give the lads a playful shock when they turned out at 'hands fall in'. It was I who got the shock and it wasn't a playful one either. It was the 'buffer' bellowing down the seamen's mess-deck hatch, "Mullen, up here", and me with a lie-in after the middle watch. Why me, I wondered, isn't anyone capable of stringing up a seabird in the heads? It wasn't the stringing up that was causing the panic—the bulkheads in the heads were covered with millions of lice that had crept out of the dead body. I suppose that when the bird went cold the nits couldn't get any more comfort they abandoned ship. You had to see it to believe it! The bulkheads were black with them. After ditching the bird it took me half an hour with a hose from the fire-hydrant to wash them away.

So next time I see anywhere an item referring to the 'monarch of the skies' gliding effortlessly across the sky, I'll remember that there's millions of parasites gliding along with less effort.



HARRISON EI

Blue-Eyed Cormorants.

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## INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

Interested persons are invited to submit contributions for *Sea Swallow*. Authors do not need to be R.N.B.W.S. members. Material may take the form of papers, notes, progress reports, letters or reviews.

Manuscripts should be typed in double spacing and submitted in duplicate. Figures and diagrams should be prepared in the size of final production.

The style used in *Sea Swallow* should be followed, with the standard abbreviations, nomenclature and use of references as in *British Birds*.

Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition, must reach the Editor by 1st October.